

SIXTY YEARS  
OF RECOLLECTIONS



TRANSLATED, WITH NOTES, BY ALBERT D. VANDAM.

EDITOR OF

"AN ENGLISHMAN IN PARIS."









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SIXTY YEARS  
OF  
RECOLLECTIONS

BY  
M. ERNEST LEGOUVÉ  
*Of the Académie-Française*

TRANSLATED, WITH NOTES, BY  
ALBERT D. VANDAM  
*The Editor of 'An Englishman in Paris'*

IN TWO VOLUMES



VOL. II  
EDEN, REMINGTON & CO.  
LONDON AND SYDNEY

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1893

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### I

ONE morning while we were staying in the country I was taking a stroll with my wife and one of my

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dearest friends, Prosper Goubaux, the author of 'Richard Darlington,' and 'Trente Ans ou la Vie d'un Joueur,' when all of a sudden there flashed upon me a title which seemed to me to contain a fit subject for a comedy : 'La Marche d'un Secret.'

I had no intention of imitating La Fontaine in showing a secret travelling from mouth to mouth and getting magnified in its progress. Not at all. I was tempted by a more profound idea ; I wanted to develop the 'physiology of indiscretion,' I wanted to dramatise the various motives which cause us to disclose a secret that has been confided to us.

'The action of the piece was laid in the Pyrenees. It began with the conversation of two young fellows of twenty. One of these has just returned from his first appointment with a married woman ; his happiness positively chokes him ; he confides everything to his friend, because he finds it impossible to hold his tongue, because every young fellow of twenty who is in love or thinks he is must necessarily have a confidant ; it is the 'indiscretion of love and youth.'

As a matter of course, his friend has sworn to keep the secret. Unfortunately the friend is also in love, but with a widow who keeps him at arm's length. She has got scent of the affair and wants to know all about it and insists upon her admirer telling her. He objects . . . he knows nothing about it, but she becomes very pressing. He refuses to surrender. She sulks or pretends to sulk.

‘You do not care for me,’ she says; ‘if you did, you would tell me everything; if you did tell me, it would prove your faith in me, and who knows but that I might be grateful in my own way.’

The bait held out is too tempting, the young fellow loses his head and tells her everything. It is the ‘indiscretion of egoism.’ The young fellow tells the secret confided to him. I had conceived a rather pretty ending to that scene. As soon as the young fellow had parted with the whole of the secret, the charming widow was supposed to rise from her seat and dismiss him with a smile, saying, ‘My dear sir, heaven preserve me from entrusting my honour to a man who cannot keep the secret of a friend.’

Third stage. What will the widow do with the secret she has dragged from the young fellow? It is delightful weather and all the rest of the visitors at Cauterets are out in the open air and enjoying themselves. She is alone with a gouty uncle who is somewhat deaf besides. How is she to spend her day, how is she to get through the wearisome hours? ‘If I told the story to my uncle? No, no, that would be too bad of me. Still, it might amuse him. Besides, I can easily keep back the names, I can even say that it happened at Bagnères instead of at Cauterets. Upon my word, I fail to see the harm of it, and I must do something to amuse the poor old man.’ She tells him everything and the third phase of the play is ‘indiscretion from weariness.’ At night, all the visitors

have come back to Cauterets, they are assembled at the Casino in the reading and drawing-room, and, as a matter of course, there is a good deal of desultory conversation. 'I think I must tell you a story,' says the uncle all of a sudden. In vain does the niece tug at the skirt of his coat to make him hold his tongue. 'Don't worry yourself,' he answers in a low voice. 'I'll veil the story carefully.' And so well does he veil it that after five minutes everyone has recognised the hero of the tale, and one of his listeners gets up saying : 'Allow me to remind you, monsieur, that you have forgotten the most essential thing in your story—the name of the husband. I am the husband.'

Goubaux was delighted with the subject. We drew out the plan of the piece during the evening, I wrote it during the night and next morning we wrote to the Comédie-Française, asking leave to read to the Committee a piece in one act, entitled, 'Le Soleil Couchant.'

A few weeks later we are in the presence of that terrible Committee which at that time was not what it is to-day, a kind of council of ten stolid and mute-like judges, making the author feel like a prisoner on his trial. The actresses, even the young ones, were present and their being there, threw a cheerful note into the proceedings. They laughed at the comic scenes, they wept at the pathetic ones, the brilliant passages of a play were applauded, in short it was a kind of 'undress' rehearsal which enlightened the

author with regard to the weak or strong points of his piece, even the silence that fell upon the listeners now and then served as a lesson. I am bound to say that during the reading of that particular piece it was the only lesson conveyed to me. It lasted for an hour during which I read with all the warmth, with all the conviction of an author of twenty-nine. I failed to produce a single effect, not one, and the final result was twelve black balls. The piece was refused unanimously. I had gone back to the country, and was trying to get over my failure as best I could when I received a short note from Goubaux.

‘The Committee of the Comédie-Française does not know what it is about. I have read our piece to Etienne Arago, the clever manager of the Vaudeville. He thinks it very amusing. He is going to put it into rehearsal immediately; he is going to cast it with the best of his company; Bardou, that excellent Bardou, will play the uncle, pretty Mme. Thénard, the widow, and for one of the lovers, he is going to engage a young fellow on whom he builds great hopes. His name is Brindeau, and I am told that he is very good-looking and has a nice voice. I’ll write him a song for his first entrance, it will set him off all the better. Does that suit you?’ If it suited me? Three weeks later I came up from the country to be present at the final rehearsal. In those days the Vaudeville theatre was in the Rue de Chartres. The



rehearsal begins, the chief of the *claqueurs* was seated next to me. When the rehearsal was over, he said, 'It is not very strong, your piece, but we may manage to pick two or three good things out of it.' I leave the theatre, and in the middle of the Place du Palais Royal, Goubaux, a friend whom he had brought to the rehearsal and I stand stock still and stare fixedly at one another.

'What do you think of it?' I ask.

'What do I think of it,' exclaims Goubaux. 'I think it abominable.'

'That's what I think.'

'And I too,' adds the friend. 'If I had had a key handy, I would have used it as a catcall. Don't let them play the piece if you can help it.'

'He is right,' says Goubaux.

'Well, I'll take it upon myself to go and see Arago and to tell him that we withdraw the piece.'

Next morning at ten I rang the bell at Arago's; it was the cook who opened the door.

'Monsieur has gone to take a bath,' she says.

'Can I write to him?'

'Monsieur will find pen and paper on that table.'

I wrote to Arago as follows—

'MY DEAR DIRECTOR,—This letter will show you what you have probably never met with in the course of your management, namely: two authors who found their piece so utterly bad at rehearsal that they prefer to withdraw it. Pray consider our "*Soleil Couchant*" ("*Setting Sun*"), as a "*Soleil Couché*" ("*A Sun that has set*"),—Sincerely Yours,

'E. LEGOUVÉ.'

Having written which, I repair to Goubaux's as fast as my legs will carry me, and we rush into one another's arms like people who have just awakened from a nightmare.

The second day after that I leave home at eleven in the morning and while strolling along, happen to cast my eye on a play bill stuck against a wall. Ye gods! 'To-night, First Performance of, "Le Soleil Couchant."' "

If a hundred thousand candles had suddenly been lighted, nay, if the sun himself had concentrated all his beams on me, I could not have felt more dazed. Of course there and then I rush to Arago's. The same cook opens the door and utters a loud cry on seeing me. 'Great heavens!' she exclaimed, 'I forgot, monsieur, to give your letter. There it is, monsieur. Don't tell master, monsieur, I'd get such a scolding.' The mischief had been done, there seemed to be a kind of fate about it; the best thing was to let matters take their course and to wait. In the evening I go and hide myself in a box on the third tier while Goubaux bravely goes down to the stage to support our troops. The first scene, that between the young fellows confiding their love affairs to one another, went very well. Encouraged by this favourable beginning, I also go down to the stage. Bardou 'was on.' The public laugh at some of his lines and when he 'comes off,' he says: 'It's all right, my lads, I've got my public in hand.' At the selfsame moment a

faint, though strident sound, for which I can find no name, falls upon my ear.

‘What’s that?’ I ask.

‘That,’ replies Goubaux, ‘that’s a catcall.’

‘Is it?’

The sound had been provoked by Brindeau’s song. He was singing out of tune and they were hissing him. I immediately disappeared and went back to my box. I did not go down again, but from that moment the hissing went on uninterruptedly. I have never heard the like in my life. There were regular dialogues between the actors and the public. One of the latter had a newspaper in his hand. ‘Give us the news from Spain,’ they cried from the pit. Goubaux’s three daughters were in an open box and simply shrieked with laughter. In about twenty minutes I turned tail in the most cowardly fashion. Goubaux stood at the wings, waiting for the actors to come off, and holding out his arms to them, like they carry the wounded off the battle-field. ‘My dear, good friends, my dear, good friends,’ he said to each and all, ‘we really beg your pardon for having given you such execrable parts.’ ‘I wish someone would get me something to drink,’ said Bardou; ‘The piece is over their heads,’ murmured Mdlle. Thénard. Over their heads or not, the curtain had to be let down in the middle of it.

The papers said that the piece was by two men of wit, who would assuredly take their revenge on some



future occasion. I received seven francs, fifty centimes for my author's fees. Next morning I said to Goubaux: 'The next time I am knocked about like that, my dear fellow, it will be at the Comédie-Française, and with a five-act piece.'

Two years later, on the 6th of June, 1838, the curtain rose upon 'Louise de Lignerolles,' by Goubaux and myself. Mdlle. Mars was the chief interpreter and the piece brought me more than seven francs fifty centimes.

## II

The reader has already been enabled to judge Goubaux, from the scene at the wings of the Vaudeville Theatre. A dramatic author who in the midst of a failure pities his interpreters instead of reproaching them, tries to comfort instead of accusing them, and apologises for having given them bad parts, an author who does all that, paints as it were his own portrait, without the help of anyone else. Nevertheless, this is only a profile, for Goubaux had two professions, two professions so utterly opposed to one another as to exclude apparently the possibility of their ever going hand in hand, yet, he proved himself as eminent in both as if he had exercised but one. He was a dramatic author and a tutor. As a dramatic author he ranks foremost among original writers. As a professor he ranks among the public benefactors. France is indebted to him for a new

system of education. Yet, of this dual existence, so fruitful in results, what does there remain? Not even a name, and scarcely a recollection. His dramas are published under a pseudonym of two syllables, the last of which only belongs to him ; (Dinaux). His educational work bears another name than his. He ought to have been doubly famous, he is unknown.

It is this unknown man whom I would like the reader to know ; it is this richly endowed and powerfully organised being in his fifty years' struggle with evil fortune I would like to sketch. Few men have been more richly endowed by nature, and worse treated by fate than Prosper Goubaux. The one bestowed lavishly, the other grudged everything most persistently. The most cruel trials, the most insuperable obstacles uprose before him at every step. Well, it seems scarcely credible, but when endeavouring to place my finger upon the most characteristic trait of this man who laboured and suffered so much, I can only find it in that line of La Fontaine—

‘Et le don d’agr  er infus avec la vie.’

Without a doubt his manly qualities were to the full as great as those merely calculated to please. In addition to his innate grace he possessed energy, perseverance, an indomitable faith ; nevertheless, with him the power to please made itself felt beyond everything, clothed everything, mingled with everything and finally determined everything. Whence

sprang that power to please? From his face? Not at all. From his general appearance? By no means. He had a thick-shaped nose, a rather large mouth, small eyes, round, rosy cheeks like a child's, a good, but somewhat heavy figure; a head that had been bald from his very youth and the hair of which was represented by a chestnut silky fringe in the nape of the neck; but the forehead, the look, the figure expressed so much goodness, cheerfulness, kindness, sincerity and sympathy that a mere glance at them bred the desire to hug him.

Such was the man: here is his life.

There are certain writers whose moral worth is inferior to that of their works. 'How,' it will be asked, 'can the fruit of a tree be better than the tree itself?' I am unable to say, but it is a fact, nevertheless, if not with regard to the tree, at any rate with regard to certain writers. Favourable circumstances, the choice of a happy subject, sometimes due to mere chance, a good position in society, a certain strength of character, capable of concentrating all its faculties on one point, or even a certain narrowness of intellect which allows them to confine themselves to a restricted order of ideas, all these enable a few men to invest the fruit of their intellect at the rate of a hundred per cent. Their books contain all that is best in them, their inferior qualities are carefully excluded from them; a lucky accident does the rest and to one's great surprise one often meets with people

who are within an ace of being famous and who on closer examination turn out to be almost mediocre.

Altogether different is a certain order of intellects, which, like the sun on certain days, rise upon the horizon bereft of their halo and which shed more heat than light. Those who only know them by their works, only know them partly, for the real book in which to read them is their mind, their heart, their conversation, their life. What then has prevented them giving the world their whole measure, what have been their defects? The defect was that they had a few good qualities too many. God endowed them with too liberal a hand ; they were too fond of too many things, they were apt at too many things. Their almost universal aptitude constantly impelled them to undertake different works, the public gasped for breath in trying to follow them ; in some instances they, the intellects, were weighed down by the sombre motto of Bernard Palissey : ' Poverty prevents great minds from getting on.'

Such was Goubaux.

He was of most humble extraction. His mother kept a mercer's shop in the Rue du Rempart, close to the Théâtre-Français and which street has since then disappeared. His childhood was more than beset with trials, it was absolutely unhappy ; a harsh and even cruel stepfather wielded his parental authority tyrannically, and converted it into a martyrdom to the child who suffered from it, though wonderful to re-

late, neither his heart nor mind was affected by it. For six years he was maltreated without becoming ill-natured himself; for six years he bent to the storm without becoming weak; for six years he trembled without becoming a coward. His first mental victory was a wonderful exploit in itself. He was more than nine years old, I believe, and he scarcely knew his alphabet; he refused to learn to read. His mother resorted to a very ingenious trick to make him. She took a volume of stories and began to read him one. The ardent imagination of the child was delighted with that beginning, but all at once, in the middle of the story, when the mother had her small listener, the playwright that was to be, under her spell, she closed the book, saying: 'If you wish to know the rest, you'll have to read it for yourself.' Eleven days afterwards he read it.

Having entered college on an exhibition, he made such brilliant progress as to attain in his own form an honour, shared about the same time by two men who have become eminent, M. Cousin and M. Villemain. In the absence of the professor, Goubaux took his chair now and then, and became the teacher of his fellow pupils. From that moment he displayed a dual quality rarely to be met with. He seemed as fit to teach as to learn. That universal faculty of comprehension, that marvellous lucidity of intellect which made the study of languages as easy to him as that of science; his vast knowledge of



history as well as of music, all these were imported by him into his system of teaching. A born teacher as it were, he taught so naturally, with so little effort, and with such genuine eloquence that the same faculty showed itself in his pupils; they could not very well pretend to a difficulty to understand that which he explained with so little difficulty. The clearness of intellect assumed with him the characteristic which seems solely reserved for kindness, it became contagious. In addition to this, he dearly loved everything that could be taught, he dearly loved all those to whom he could teach something. It was difficult to resist him. One becomes forcibly a good pupil when the heart of a friend obviously hovers on the lips of a teacher.

He was fortunate in getting a number of lessons, for at nineteen he was a married man, and at twenty a father. He has often told me that, in order to increase his modest budget, he went several times a month to look after the books of a lottery agency whence he returned at two in the morning, singing and clanking his stick on the flagstones with a conquering air, he had earned two francs and his supper.

Nevertheless, a few years later, he was indebted to that intellect, which, without exaggeration, might be termed marvellous, for a proposal which was almost equivalent to a fortune. A clever business man called upon him. 'Monsieur,' he said, 'you have a great deal of learning and I happen to have none at all;

but you have no money whatever, and I happen to have some. Suppose we were to enact Florian in prose, suppose we were to realise the fable of the Blind and the Halt. Let us go into partnership and open a boarding-school. Each will bring his own capital to the concern—you, your intelligence I my money, and we'll share the profits. The offer was eagerly accepted, and the St-Victor boarding school opened to the delight of the young professor, who found himself at the head of an important establishment. Nevertheless, the purchase of the furniture and the house itself had run away with a great deal of money, another partner had to be called in, and as a last payment, a bill of 45,000 francs at six months had to be given. There were two signatories to it, though, in reality, only one was responsible, and Goubaux was highly amused at having to give his signature; he felt rather pleased than otherwise at the idea that his name was supposed to be worth 45,000 francs, it gave him an air of commercial importance which flattered his sense of dignity.

At the end of the six months, on the eve of the bill becoming due, his co-signatory disappeared and the young fellow had to face that enormous debt, without a penny to meet it. His state of mind may easily be imagined, though he himself failed to grasp at first the extent of his misfortune, for these 45,000 francs were the bane of his whole after life. A debt of 45,000 francs does not seem very formidable; in

reality, it may mean a burden of two, three or four-hundred thousand francs; it is an unholy pact with usury; I have known Goubaux to borrow money at 18 per cent. It means days and prodigious mental efforts spent in renewing a bill, it means a superior intellect, intended for better things, draining its energies in order to exorcise the law official armed with a stamped document, in order to escape from some brutal threat, in order to substitute one creditor for another; it means a constant and ever increasing terror at the approach of the last day of the month, it means the necessity of having to break one's promise a score of times; it means constant reproaches from some quarter or other, sleepless nights, desperate combinations, it means, in one word, the worst and most horrible slavery—the servitude of debt. No doubt, Goubaux might, like many others and with greater justification, have filed his petition, for he was being punished while perfectly innocent. But he was five-and-twenty, chivalrous and honourable to a degree; he felt confident of his strength and intelligence and he had signed his name. Hence, he took an oath to himself that he would pay and pay he did, but it took him forty-four years to pay those 45,000 francs, and when he died the last instalment of the debt had only been discharged a few weeks.

The first crisis in that long struggle was terrible. One day he thought himself lost; he had to pay 12,000 francs within the next twenty-four hours, and



he had not a louis towards them. That terrible word bankruptcy, the very sound of which rent his heart and made his lips grow pale, he would have to utter it. He had taken refuge with some of his relations in a room on a fifth story; they were simply dissolved in tears, and mad with despair. He alone did not despair; he was still devising means to avert the crisis. At that very moment a carriage passing below shook the windows of the poorly furnished apartment. 'Oh, those carriage people, those rich egotists,' exclaims one of the company, 'and to think that to the man who is seated in that carriage those 12,000 francs would be a mere nothing, and yet, if we were to ask him or his like to lend them to us, they would not lend us 500 francs.' At these words, Goubaux looks up. Some one was preferring a charge against mankind in general, and that seemed an injustice to him. 'Why should you censure that rich man who happens to be passing below, and whom you do not know?' he replies. 'How do you know but that he might help me if he knew of my trouble?' 'That is exactly like you and your unbearable optimism,' is the answer. 'My optimism, as you choose to call it, is only so much equity or sound sense.' 'Sound sense, you say. You have applied to a score of people, every one of whom has refused you.' 'They could not help me.' 'Well, the one who drove by in his carriage could help you, just go and ask him to do

so, and see what he'll say.' 'Very well,' exclaims Goubaux, 'I'll go, if not to him; at anyrate, to someone who is as rich as he, and whom I know no more than I know him, and who will not refuse me.' 'You are mad.' 'We'll see about that.'

With which he rushes home, snatches up a pen and writes. To whom, do you think? To M. Laffitte whom he had never seen, and to whom he tells in a few words . . . . But I had better give the letter *verbatim*—

'MONSIEUR,—I am five-and-twenty, the father of three children. I am an honest and honourable man and people have told me that I am not without talent. My spotless name has been used as a means of speculation, to found an establishment. I am being crushed by a debt of twelve thousand francs and in three days I'll stand disgraced before the world. When all appeal to one's fellow men has been in vain, one generally appeals to Providence, I appeal to you. M. Delanneau who has as it were adopted me, will tell you that a favour solicited so frankly may be granted with confidence. It is the honourable poor man who appeals to the honourable rich man.

'My fate depends on you. I am awaiting your answer in your antechamber. My family is waiting some distance from here. Have I presumed too far?

'I have the honour to be, etc.,

'P. GOUBAUX.'

M. Laffitte told the servant to show him in and carefully looked at his visitor whose letter had impressed him. The unmistakable honesty of Goubaux's face impressed him still more, and five minutes later the principal of the boarding school was saved for the time being.

Only for the time being, next day the struggle had to be begun afresh, for, first of all, he had to pay

M. Laffitte. Next day, other debts, becoming urgent in their turn, began to worry him like the first, next morning, in short, he had to take up once more the burden of the Saint-Victor Institute which had to be *kept going*, a terrible burden, especially to him. Goubaux had all the grand qualities of the professor. Science, a natural talent for teaching, a fondness for children, the art of managing them ; he was a matchless teacher, unfortunately for him, there never was a more execrable 'Marchand de Soupe.' I am obliged to employ the vulgar expression, for which there is no synonym\* Both his shortcomings and his good qualities rendered him unfit for such a part, for it requires three indispensable gifts, namely, 1st the spirit of order ; 2nd economy ; 3rd authority. Goubaux was too embarrassed in circumstances to be careful ; he was too generous to be economical ; he was too harrassed by impending bills to be master in his own house. A sad but nevertheless charming story will illustrate that struggle against his terrible servitude from which he managed to extricate himself, as usual by his own seductive powers. One day two of his pupils enter his private room, crying both with anger and pain. One of the masters had given them a cruel thrashing. Goubaux, beside himself with indignation, asks for his name, in order to dismiss him

\* The term is applied by the French lad to the principal of a boarding school irrespective of the latter's liberality with regard to the commensariat, just as the term 'Marchand de Sommeil' is applied by the French workman to his landlord.—TR.

ignominiously there and then. They tell him that it is the assistant head-master, at which Goubaux turns very pale and remains silent for a moment or so. 'All right,' he says at last in a subdued tone which betrays both his anger and confusion ; 'all right, go back to the schoolroom, I will speak to him.'

Why this change of tone, why this sudden subsidence, why this confusion? Why? Because that man was his creditor, who had lent him a considerable sum of money at a critical moment and on the condition of entering the establishment as assistant head-master. And Goubaux had no right to dismiss him. Goubaux was compelled to stifle his indignation, his kindness, his feeling of justice, his feeling of duty. He was compelled to manage with fair words this savage brute who was not only cruel but incapable besides. One may easily imagine Goubaux's feelings under the circumstances.

But let us inquire for a moment what would have been the result of a similar situation in another institution of the same kind? What would have been the feelings, the behaviour of the two pupils and their fellows face to face with this denial of justice? A violent irritation, a feeling of indignation against the head of the establishment, whom they would have accused of cruelty and of weakness. What did Goubaux's pupils do? They simply pitied him. One of them who knew the position of affairs, who was aware of his financial difficulties told the others, and their



anger changed into commiseration, they became if possible, more affectionate towards him. 'Poor man,' they said, 'how he must suffer at not being able to protect us, how it must grieve him to be able only to defend us partly.' This seems so utterly incredible, that I should have hesitated to repeat the words, were I not in a position to name my informant. I have them from the lips of one of Goubaux's old pupils, from one of the two victims of the assistant head-master's brutality, from one of our most brilliant colleagues, M. Edmond Cottinet, who not only told me the fact, but added some characteristic details.

'Surely,' he said, 'the Saint-Victor establishment left much to desire, the food was indifferent, order and discipline were conspicuous by their absence, the masters were often harsh and unjust, but M. Goubaux was there and his presence made up for everything. Would you believe, that on one occasion when my mother, annoyed at something that had happened at the school, wanted to take me away, I positively refused to be taken. "It would grieve M. Goubaux," I answered. Not once, but a hundred times, when our discontent was at its highest and we were perfectly ripe for resistance, our anger vanished at the mere sight of his coming into the room to take the place of the ordinary master. He spoke so well and had such a fine voice. Everything he said went straight to one's heart and mind. He could make us cry or laugh or think just as he liked. And when he was

gone, the memory of that hour was sufficient to make us put up cheerfully for a week with bad food and bad masters. Moreover, we were very proud of his success as a playwright. At the premières of his pieces, there were always half-a-dozen of us on the field of battle, applauding frantically. His triumphs were virtually our own. In short, to this day, after a lapse of forty years, it does me good to talk of M. Goubaux, and I will tell you a story which will still further prove the spell he exercised over everyone. His eldest daughter had reached the age of twenty, but she had no marriage portion. A distinguished professor, and very well off to boot, asked for her hand. Why? Of course you would say because he cared for her. That was no doubt one of the reasons; but the principal reason was his admiration for Goubaux. He married the daughter for the pleasure of calling M. Goubaux "father-in-law."

M. Cottinet's words have opportunely reminded me of Goubaux's other profession, of his second self which agreed so well with his first. I used to call him jocularly 'Maître Jacques.'\* He often began the scene of a drama on a sheet of paper headed 'Pension Saint-Victor'; he now and then replied to a letter connected with his scholastic duties while leaning against a wing, and his author's fees fre-

\* The French equivalent for our 'Jack of all trades,' though the designation in French does not necessarily imply that the person thus designated is 'master of none.'—TR.

quently went to replenish the empty exchequer of the schoolmaster. To whom did he owe the playwright's talent? To one of those accidents of which his existence was so full and which were at the same time the work of Providence and of his own. Providence afforded him the opportunity, he embraced it.

### III

Goubaux loved almost everything, understood everything, and felt an interest in everything; hence he felt an interest in the drama just as he felt an interest in everything else; I might say a greater interest than he felt in anything else. A man gifted with a fertile imagination like his has necessarily a strong liking for works of fiction. One day when dining with some friends, the conversation turned on the drama. An animated discussion ensued about the unities of time and place. One of the guests, an uncompromising classicist, contended that the principle of confining the action of a stage play to a period of twenty-four hours was not due to the mere whim of one literary legislator, that compliance with this salutary injunction was one of the foremost conditions of success. 'A piece, the action of which would extend over a twelvemonth could not possibly have any interest.'

'No interest,' replied Goubaux with that dash and brilliancy which invested his conversation with such a charm, 'no interest because it would extend over

a twelvemonth? Why, if it extended over thirty twelvemonths it would be all the more interesting.'

'Ha, ha, over thirty years,' exclaimed his interlocutor, 'it would be as Boileau says—

“‘Enfant au premier acte et barbon au dernier.’”

'Exactly; a child in the first act, and an old man in the last. That's exactly where the interest would lie, in the change time works in all things human; in men's fortunes, in men's characters, in men's faces and figures; nay, even in men's souls, in the gradual and quasi fatal evolution of the good and evil passions.'

'The theory sounds tempting enough; what about the practice?'

'The practice,' repeated the playwright that was to be, getting on his mettle by being contradicted, 'I'll wager to write a piece the action of which will extend over thirty years and which will make you shudder and cry.'

'You write a piece. But you have never written a piece in your life.'

'All the more reason to make a beginning.' And a few months afterwards he read them the scenario of what became the most popular drama of the period. 'Trente ans ou la vie d'un Joueur.\*' He had written the piece as he would have done anything else, because the opportunity for doing it presented

\* The version best known in England is 'Rouge et Noir' played by the late M. Fechter during his lesseeship of the Lyceum Theatre.—TR.



itself. The moment he was in need of a certain talent, he had it, and there was an end of the thing.

When the piece was finished, he had to find a manager to play it. He was told to solicit the collaboration of Victor Ducange, one of the most famous melodramatists of the time. One morning, therefore, he calls upon the man, who nodded complacently, and with a smile when they addressed him as the Corneille of the Boulevards. 'The work shows the hand of a novice,' says Ducange, after having heard the play, but there are a good many interesting things in it. What it really wants is a prologue, and I'll look to that. It is not enough, young man, to be able to cook a good dinner, one must also know how to lay the cloth.'

A few days later Victor Ducange showed the prologue to Goubaux, who as a university man and professor could not help noticing sundry startling liberties the author had taken with grammar and syntax. He ventured to point them out in a timid way.

'My dear monsieur, the fact that it is I who have written this must and will suffice.' Goubaux did not say another word.

The first performance produced a tremendous effect. All the former rules of dramatic composition toppled over like the walls of Jericho at the sound of the trumpet. A new road had been opened and

Goubaux, whose success had been, as it were, a revelation to himself, attempted a further step on it.

The dramatist's talent is a very special and peculiar gift. It is not necessarily related to any other intellectual faculty. A man may have a great deal of wit and cleverness, he may be a capital scholar and write well, and yet be absolutely incapable of writing a piece. I have seen men of great parts, cultured men of letters bring me comedies and dramas which seemed to have been written by a child. On the other hand, I have had submitted to me, by people of very average intellect, stage plays in which there was a nameless something which could not have been replaced by no matter what, which was not acquired, of which they would never get rid again and which unmistakably stamped them as dramatic authors. In one word it was *the gift*, and Goubaux had that gift to a supreme degree. With him everything was inborn, even skill ; everything was spontaneous, even experience. Furthermore, seeing that he was a thinker as well as a dramatist, his taste led him to found his dramas on a character or on a passion rather than on a mere fact. After having written '*Trente ans ou la vie d'un Joueur*,' he conceived the idea of portraying a life swayed by ambition—'*Richard Darlington's*.' This time, however, he invited the co-operation of a real master of dramatic art—Alexandre Dumas. The share of each in that joint work has been set forth in

his 'Mémoires' by Alexandre Dumas himself with delightful sincerity and good-nature.

To Goubaux belongs the primary and fundamental idea, the invention of the principal character, the very original scene of the elections, the dramatic interview between the King and Richard. To Dumas belongs the prologue, a goodly number of the most dramatic situations and the *dénouement*.

That very *dénouement* gave the collaborateurs a good deal of trouble. The young wife of Richard had to disappear, but how? One morning, Goubaux, who was cudgelling his brains all the while, goes to Dumas, he rings, enters the room; Dumas is still in bed, but the moment he catches sight of Goubaux, he stands up in his bed, his long black legs showing under his white shirt. He frantically waves his hands and thunders, 'My boy, I *chuck* her out of the window, I *chuck* her out of the window.' 'Her' was Richard's wife, Jenny.\* Those who were at the first performance still recollect the thrill of horror and terror when Richard with livid face, came back to the balcony whence he had flung his wife into the yawning chasm. True, it was Frédéric Lemaître who played Richard. The stage trick by which he rendered that reappearance on the balcony more terrible still, was not generally known in those days and few of the public suspected it. It was carried

\* I have purposely made use of the word *chuck* instead of 'fling,' though even the former scarcely renders the vigorous but not very refined expression of Dumas.—TR.

out by means of an apparatus in the wings which threw a powerful ray of coloured light on his face and made it look positively green. To complete the effect he had arranged with the actress who enacted the part of Jenny that, in rushing away from him towards the balcony, she would drop the muslin scarf she had round her head and shoulders. The wrap was, as it were, staring him in the face when he stepped from the balcony on to the stage ; it was the spectre of his wife. Any one else would have shuddered or started back, or have resorted to an equally hackneyed device. He simply bounded towards it and picked it up in the twinkling of an eye, crammed it into his pocket like a handkerchief, and his new father-in-law knocking at the door at the same moment he went to open it with that insolent, devil-may-care ease of which he seems to have had the exclusive secret, while a bit of the white material kept peeping from his pocket and flapping against his coat. It was simply ghastly. Those were the moments that revealed one of the most striking traits of Frédéric Lemaître's talent: namely, the art of 'individualising' a scene and to double its effect by some picturesque detail. Those who have seen him in it will not easily forget the second act of 'La Vie d'un Joueur' when he wishes to obtain from his wife the signature which means her ruin ; the way he watched Mme. Dorval while she was hesitating to give it; and his gloating, half-muttered cry of 'She is

going to sign,' while she took up the pen. What after all, had he added to the text? A gesture, nothing more. He simply took a pinch of snuff. He gave the scene its tragic effect by dragging it down to the 'ruffian's' level.

But the piece in which that talent verged on the sublime was 'Les Mystères de Paris.' Eugène Sue had asked Goubaux to assist him in dramatising his novel. Frédéric Lemaître played Jacques Ferrand, the *notary*, the debauchee notary, the thief who is looked upon as a saint in the neighbourhood. The scene of the second act was laid in his office. A poor ruined manufacturer came to solicit his aid; the office was full of people, the clerks were all at their desks. Jacques Ferrand was to give that unhappy and deserving petitioner a note of 500 francs. The two authors felt very pleased at having introduced the incident of that well-bestowed gift, but Frédéric himself, in the course of the rehearsals, seemed fidgetty and dissatisfied with the idea.

'What's the matter? That trait of hypocritical generosity does not seem to strike you as true and profound?' asked Goubaux.

'It's neither sufficiently hypocritical nor sufficiently profound,' was the brusque reply. 'Jacques Ferrand's benevolence does, after all, not cost him very much. There is not much merit in giving 500 francs when one has merely to take them out of one's cashbox. The real saint often borrows in order to give, I will



not have anything to do with your note of 500 francs.'

'In that case what shall we do and what will you do?'

'This is how I would manage it if I were you. When the poor fellow tells me of his misfortunes, I'll run to my cashbox to get the money for which he asks me. But my cashbox is being constantly drained by my donations and only contains three hundred francs in notes. I'll make up the sum with sixty francs in five franc pieces, I'll even add some small change, and finally finding that I am still short, borrow the rest from my principal clerk. That's the thing to do, for the affair is sure to be bruited about and make a noise in the quarter. In that way I beat Saint-Martin, seeing that I take even my neighbour's cloak to clothe the poor. There is no doubt about my being a Saint after that.'

In the fourth act he tried to introduce an effect of a similar kind, but this time the authors did not think it advisable to satisfy him. It was where Cicely, the mulatto girl, for whom he has conceived a mad passion, enters his room. At the sight of her, the instincts of the brutal sensualist assert their sway and lead to a scene between him and the girl in which entreaties, threats, tears, protestations of love follow one another in rapid succession. During one of the final rehearsals, Frédéric was perambulating the stage like a wild beast in his cage.

‘What are you looking for now?’ asked Sue laughing.

‘Is there no means of putting a truss of straw in one of the corners, and so arouse a fear in the mind of the public that I might fling her down?’ he answered.

Frédéric had to do without his truss of straw, he proved none the less terrible in the delineation of Jacques Ferrand’s brutal sensuality. On the first night he was waiting for his cue at the wings, just before that identical scene, when he suddenly turned to Goubaux who was standing by his side, and in a tone and accents which it would be impossible to describe, said, ‘And now, I am going to give them a taste of my quality.’

People have often compared Frédéric Lemaître to Talma. I once asked Goubaux who had known the latter very well whether the comparison was justified in any way, and he replied in the affirmative, ‘for,’ said he, ‘the same word—the word “genius”—best describes both their talent.’ Were they equal to one another? Perhaps, in virtue of the very difference between them. Talma was the god of tragedy and drama, Frédéric was the demon of them. When Talma spoke about his art, his features assumed a kind of pensive though impassioned expression of melancholy which was still further increased by his shortsightedness and invested every sentence of his with a nameless something both poetical and pro-

found. Each of his remarks showed the incessant pursuit of the ideal and the realistic, of the accuracy of tone and the beauty of sound. The rhythm of the line was one of his constant preoccupations. One day he was talking to a friend about the two lines of Hamlet to his mother.

‘Votre crime est horrible, exécrable, odieux,  
Mais il n’est pas plus grand que la bonté des dieux !’\*

‘I am pretty sure,’ he said, ‘of never missing the effect of these two lines. I have put notes to them ; the first line is an ascending scale, the second a descending scale.’

Frédéric Lemaître never troubled about that kind of thing, and joining Goubaux’s recollections to my own I feel tempted to say that Frédéric was essentially an artist of the earth earthly. What he invariably looked for was the accent, truth, passion and force. Added to this, he had some very grave and almost unbearable defects, he droned, and whined and ranted, when he became pathetic he became almost ridiculous, but all this was redeemed by one immense quality, the like of which I have never met with in any actor, namely, power. No one ever ‘filled’ the stage, as he did. Then there was his boldness of gesture, of attitude, not to mention his bursts of anger and indignation. His faculty for transformation was

\* This, I believe, is Ducis’ translation of the two lines—

‘Confess yourself to heaven ;  
Repent what’s past, avoid what is to come.’—TR.



pretty well unique. It is worthy of remark that he was equally magnificent in the part of Don César de Bazan and in that of Ruy-Blas. But the most striking coincidence was that his features offered the same antithesis as his talent. The grandiose and the commonplace were inextricably mixed. Magnificent eyes, a forehead beaming with intelligence and a nose which made you wonder how it could have come there. A nose starting as a Greek one and ending up like a trumpet; a mobile, contractile mouth, equally capable of expressing contempt and anger, with a lower lip the corners of which were absolutely commonplace and vulgar. Talma, away from the theatre was simplicity and kindness itself; Frédéric was always attudinising, always acting; at times he swaggered like a swashbuckler, at others he swayed about like a Bohemian; in short, he was the 'mummer' in everything he did, in every word he uttered. When he came to Goubaux's school to see his sons, his arrival invariably caused a sensation. With his hat 'stuck' on the back of his head and striking the steps with his cane as he went, he interpellated the servants at the top of his voice without the least regard for the dignity of the place. 'You'll tell M. Goubaux that there will be no rehearsal to-day.' Yet, with all this, some amazing moments of grandeur and self-respect. Casimir Delavigne had entrusted to him the principal part in 'Marino Faliero.' One day he comes to rehearsal in a semi-

state of intoxication. The indignant author snatches the part from his hands, saying, 'You'll not enact my piece, monsieur.' His eyes flashing with anger, he rushes towards the poet as if to strike him to the earth. In fact, one blow from him would have been sufficient, but Frédéric stops midway and in a subdued and trembling voice, says, 'Monsieur Delavigne, I thank you for having given me the opportunity of showing you to what degree I respect you.'

#### IV

My digression on Frédéric Lemaître is justified by the fact of his having been indebted to Goubaux for two of his best parts. But I am bound to remember that in reality in Goubaux's life, the drama was only an intermediate occupation, adding something to his budget and to his fame, but for all that an intermediate occupation. The true foundation and the dominant interest of his life lay in that Saint-Victor Institution to which we will return once again to leave it no more, for it is there that we shall see Goubaux accomplish his final solvency by a marvellous stroke of pluck and invention.

Goubaux had with regard to public education ideas, generally accepted to-day, but which were considered very novel and daring when he had the courage to formulate them for the first time. What struck him most forcibly was the want of sympathy between the

education provided by the State and the spirit of modern society. On the one side he beheld society tending more and more towards industry, commerce, agriculture, applied sciences. He heard fathers express a wish for a professional education for their sons and demand special teaching to that effect ; and at the same time he was aware that collegiate or university education in no way supplied that want. Literature was its sole object, there was no professional training. This anomaly had the effect of shocking a mind which was so essentially modern as Goubaux's ; that want worried him, he had felt for many years that something new should be attempted in that direction, but how was he to attain his aim ? There were numberless obstacles in his way ; first, his own institution, the pupils at which attended the courses at the college. How was he to introduce the new system of education in that establishment without ruining it, and how was he to prevent its ruin ? Furthermore, how was he to overcome the preliminary and insuperable difficulties ? Would not the University itself uprise against this innovation ? Would the Minister of Public Instruction sanction it ? In those days there were no ministers like M. Jules Simon and M. Victor Duruy ; and M. Villemain had said to me : ' A French college in France ! not while I am alive.' Moreover, did not the air resound with protests from a number of eminent and earnest intellects who averred that to deprive education of

the solid and moral basis of classical tuition was tantamount to decapitating the intellect. According to them it was simply nothing less than materialising the age, than making the earning of money the sole aim of life. To all of which objections, Goubaux, with the authority acquired by long experience, replied: 'Why should that system of education be less capable of elevating the mind and the heart? Are we to take it that the Greek and Latin works contain *all* the heroic examples, the lessons of patriotism, the instances of strength of character, and loftiness of soul? Is there no poetry which brings the ideal home to our lives and to our souls outside the poetry contained in the works of Homer and Virgil? The world of science we wish to throw open to young minds, that world which means nothing less than the whole of the earth and the heavens, is that world not as good, as a means of education, as the study of some speeches by Livy or Tacitus? Will the intelligent contemplation of the grand work of creation and of all the conquests achieved by created man be less conducive to the knowledge of God to young men than the often uncertain interpretation of the remains of a dead language belonging to a vanished people, and will that interpretation make better men of them than that intelligent contemplation? In short, does not the study of France herself, of her language and literature deserve to stand in the front rank of public

education? Why then should there not be French colleges in France?’

These words had the effect of impressing a goodly number of eminent men, but he was challenged to make good his words by deeds. From that moment his plan was virtually drawn up, in order to carry it out, he resorted to heroic measures : heroism is often synonymous with wisdom. His establishment held about a hundred pupils ; he dismissed sixty, namely, all those who attended the collegiate classes, and remained with the few converts to the new method. Apparently this was tantamount to committing suicide. How was he to make both ends meet with forty pupils when he had scarcely been able to do so with a hundred? The position was all the more serious, seeing that his institution did not belong solely to himself. His creditors had a lien on it. To send away half of his pupils was to deprive them of half of their security. It was not a question of asking them for a delay or for a new loan, but he had to induce them to sacrifice their guarantee. He was bound to convert them to his ideas, to make them share his hopes, to inspire them with his faith. Well, after an hour's conversation they were not only won over, but convinced. They were not only disarmed, but converted. Thanks to his persuasive and spontaneous eloquence, he transformed his creditors into lenders. They not only did not ask him for money, but offered him some. People who have twitted the ant with be-



ing a spendthrift vied with one another for the honour and pleasure of affording him the time to await the successful issue of his idea. But this honourable competition to befriend him and this material assistance were not sufficient. A great many arrears of debt worried and hampered him, when, one morning, as usual, there sprang from the earth or descended from the sky a *Deus ex machina* who intervened at the critical moment and enabled him to pursue his onward march. Truly, he was, as usual again, indebted in a great measure to himself, the miracle was simply the harvest of what he had sown. On the 10th of June 1855, I received the following letter from him—

‘MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have met with one of those pieces of good fortune and spent an hour of unalloyed joy such as I have rarely, very rarely had in my life. The joy was occasioned by the visit of one of my former pupils who was kind enough to recollect a distant past and to acknowledge a debt to which I had never given a moment’s thought. The piece of good fortune consists in my being freed for a twelvemonth from all care and anxiety. Such a thing has not happened to me since 1820; my dear friend Gilbert,\* has drawn up an account between us the elements of which had no existence save in his own affectionate remembrance of me, because I never considered that he owed me a penny. Yes, Gilbert brought me yesterday *six thousand francs*. It is the first use he made of his recently acquired wealth.

‘However unexpected and useful this timely assistance has been to me, I was still more deeply touched by the act itself than by the money, and the tears which welled into my eyes were due to the fact, that, while listening to Gilbert, I was pleased with myself. I was debating with myself whether I would come and tell you the story personally, but was afraid of breaking down in the middle of it. I feel more sure of myself while writing than while talking.

\* M. Gilbert, who had been educated gratuitously by Goubaux had just made a very rich and creditable match. He is the author of two critical studies, one on Vauvenargues, the other on Regnard, both of which gained the award of the Académie Française.



‘Good-bye, my faithful chum of 1837, my faithful supporter from the very day when I undertook that which I now hope to accomplish soon. A cordial shake of the hand for you and a kiss for your wife and daughter.

‘GOUBAUX.’

A touching letter if ever there was one. Nevertheless it wants a postscriptum. The name of Gilbert recalls to my mind another, that of Alexandre Dumas, the younger, who was also a pupil of Goubaux a little before Gilbert. One day the rumour spread that the elder Dumas had been wrecked and lost his life off the Sicilian coast; Goubaux sent for the lad. ‘My dear boy,’ he said to him, ‘I trust that this is a false report, but if it be true, remember that this house is yours. Heaven preserve me from pretending to be able to replace your father, but I’ll do everything in my power to remind you of him.’ And this happened about 1834, *i.e.*, at the moment when Goubaux was most cruelly worried for money, and yet he did not for a moment hesitate to shoulder that new burden. His own misfortunes, instead of wholly engrossing him, only had the effect of making him more sensitive to misfortunes which were not his own. While half-ruined, he still thought of saving others from ruin. I need scarcely say that Dumas followed Gilbert’s example. He also remembered in due time a debt similar to that of Gilbert and which Goubaux had also forgotten. Thanks to all those instances of gratitude and in spite of his own generosity, Goubaux came within sight of the goal, but in order to reach it

he had to travel a last bit of road which was harder to him than it might have been to others.

A scheme like Goubaux's, requires, in order to succeed, three men: an inventor, a man who has the gift of organisation, and a good administrator. Goubaux was an inventor of the first water, his faculty for organisation was, however, very second rate, and as an administrator he ranked very low indeed. Luckily, he conceived the idea of charging someone else with the administrative functions to which he was so badly suited. Who was that some one? The City of Paris. After having requested and obtained her patronage, he boldly proposed to put her in his stead and place. The City of Paris accepted the offer. The Saint-Victor Institution successively assumed the names of 'École François I.' 'École Chaptal,' 'Collège Municipal Chaptal,' and Goubaux changed his title of Principal of the institute for that of Director. The change meant more than the discharge of all his liabilities, it meant comfort and freedom from care. Freed at last from debt and carking worries, he had the satisfaction of watching, from the window of that room where he had suffered and contrived so much, the influx of more than eighteen hundred scholars within the enlarged grounds; he had the satisfaction of seeing the walls of the original and humble establishment extend further and further until the establishment swallowed up the adjacent mansions and finally be-

came the centre of a new system of public education in France. But Goubaux was not content with having founded the method, he wished, before he died, to insure its future and he accomplished his wish by one of those strokes which virtually show the whole man.

At the period when he was merely the principal of the Saint-Victor Institute his concierge was a man whom he particularly liked and respected. The concierge had a son, an intelligent lad. Goubaux noticed his intelligence and took him away from the porter's lodge; no, he did not take him away, he as it were left him there, for the lodge meant the paternal home and Goubaux did not wish the lad to be ashamed of it.

So he took him into the school, made him sleep in the dormitories, attend chapel and join the others in play hours, but every now and then the lad went back to the lodge to assist his father in his duties. And would the reader know the result of that education, and what became of the lad? He became his master's principal assistant, then his successor and finally the chief exponent and continuator of his method. At the hour I write (1885-88) he governs that magnificent municipal college, yclept Chaptal, with a prestige and lustre which is only another title to the credit and honour of him who, as it were, guessed his capabilities in that respect. It is not only an institution of which the city may feel justly proud, but the net income derived from it often

amounts to a hundred thousand francs per annum. What I am going to say is scarcely credible, it is, nevertheless, a fact. Twenty-seven years have elapsed since Goubaux breathed his last and during that time there has not been one prefect of the Seine nor one municipal council to either of whom I did not address at least one humble petition, praying them, not to substitute Goubaux's name for that of Chaptal who has had absolutely nothing to do with the affair, but merely to add the former's name to the latter on the frontispiece or door of the building.\* The name of Prosper Goubaux who did everything is still wanting on that frontispiece. MM. Haussmann, Jules Ferry, Calmon, Léon Say, all of whom I worried until they must have loathed my very name have all given me their promise, not one of them has kept it. One day I decided to address myself to M. Thiers. It was at Versailles on New Year's day 1873. M. Thiers had kindly invited me to breakfast with him in a non-official way, and just as we were sitting down to table, I asked him in a jocular way : 'M. le Président de la République, will you make me a present for the new year?' 'With the greatest of pleasure, my dear colleague,' he answered, laughing. 'What can I give you, I wonder?'

Thereupon I told him the story of Goubaux's

\* Chaptal was a Minister of the Interior during the First Empire and died in 1832. He was an eminent professor of chemistry and made some valuable discoveries that benefited art and industry.—TR.

heroic perseverance in brief, adding that the inscription of his name on the frontispiece of the college was his due, that it was virtually a debt of honour due to his children who had a right to claim it as an inheritance, that the inscription would be a salutary lesson to all the pupils, and the only means of the City of Paris to discharge her obligations towards him.

‘You are absolutely right in what you say,’ replied M. Thiers, with that spontaneous animation which constituted one of the charms of his character, then, turning to M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire he went on, ‘I say, Saint-Hilaire, I wish you to write to the Prefect of the Seine to insist in my name upon M. Legouvé’s getting his demands.’ M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire wrote the letter, which reached the Prefect in due time and was answered—after that nothing. Nor is this all. I need not point out the sympathetic eagerness of our city fathers to perpetuate on the walls of Paris the remembrance of those who set Paris on fire. Well, in spite of all our efforts they have systematically neglected or refused, which comes to the same thing, to inscribe the name of Goubaux at one of the corners of one of those modest streets adjoining the Collège Chaptal. Does it not look as if the cruel fate that weighed him down during his life were bent upon pursuing him after his death, as if public ingratitude were bent upon pursuing the cruel policy of fate? After all, it does not matter much. They



may endeavour to efface his name from his work, the work will, nevertheless, live, and Goubaux is, in spite of everything, the 'creator' of the system of professional education in France. Let us, therefore, refrain from attaching the smallest trapping of woe to his memory. He would not thank us for it, he who always showed not only a placid, but a laughing face to the blows of fortune. In fact, I may say, without exaggeration, that I never knew so cheerful a man, as that man who was so sorely tried by fortune. In the midst of his most terrible anguish there would suddenly come a burst of laughter, like a ray of sunshine piercing the banked-up, sullen clouds. In a letter to my daughter, after telling her of the endless worries with which he was for ever contending, he adds: 'Oh, by the by, on Sunday, we'll be dining with the Gilberts. I don't feel hungry yet, but the appetite will come in good time.' One of his last collaborators was Michel Masson, gentle Michel Masson, who with his long, silvery locks and placid face looked like a white lamb. One day while he was working with Goubaux at some drama the name of which I have forgotten, Goubaux proposed a new incident. The idea does not seem to strike Masson, who with ever so many precautions and apologies hints very timidly and in a kind of whisper that the idea may not be altogether appropriate, 'All right, Masson,' exclaims Goubaux, rising from his chair, '*if you are going to be angry about it. . . .*'



The most admirable feature of Goubaux's gaiety was that it not only sharpened his fancy, imagination and wit, but that it assumed one of the forms by which he manifested his indomitable pluck. Men, nay even God, might abandon him, he steadfastly refused to strike or desert his flag. One of our common friends, a lady, said, 'If M. Goubaux fell into the sea, and had been absolutely drowned for more than an hour, people would still see his arms frantically waving above the water and his voice cry for help.' Such was the man ; he had faith, hope and charity, and these saved him.

## CHAPTER II

A digression on Dramatic Collaboration.—Mme. Legouvé tells a Story.—Her Husband sees the subject of a Comedy in it.—He sets to work at once to draw the Plan.—Opportune arrival of Goubaux.—They make up their minds to 'collaborate once more.—A few instances of Collaboration. — How M. Legouvé and Prosper Goubaux wrote 'Louise de Lignerolles.'—A French Interior.—The Authors are stopped by a difficulty.—How Authors find their Sensational Effects and Dénouements.—How M. Legouvé found his.—A true Story.—M. Legouvé finds a Letter relating to it among his papers and at the same time finds his Dénouement.—A peep at the National Guards in the late Thirties.—The Dress Rehearsals of 'Louise de Lignerolles.'—The Première.—Success.

### I

THE system of collaboration is very much decried nowadays ; I will only say a few words in its defence. Let us suppress for a moment the results of collaboration from the French repertory for the last sixty years, and by the same stroke of the pen we lose a great part of the dramatic work of Scribe, nearly the whole of the dramatic work of Bayard, Mélesville, Dumas, Dennery, the whole of the dramatic work of Labiche, of Barrière, the whole of the dramatic work of Duvert and Lausanne, the whole of the dramatic work of Meilhac and Halévy, and last of all, five of the masterpieces in the domains of comedy and the

drama. In comedy we lose 'Le Gendre de M. Poirier,' 'Mademoiselle de la Seiglière' and 'Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle,' for though these works bear the name of one author only on their title pages, they are, nevertheless, the work of two authors. In the drama we lose 'La Tour de Nesle' and 'Richard Darlington.' No one respects and admires more than I the immortal works which, 'fully armed' have sprung from one brain, such as 'Œdipe Roi,' 'Macbeth,' 'Polyeucte,' 'Britannicus.' But are there not, even among the masterpieces, stage plays due to the association of two men of genius? Is not 'Le Cid' by Corneille and Guillen de Castro? Is not 'Iphigénie' by Racine and Euripides; is not 'Phèdre' by Racine, Euripides and Seneca. Are there many collaborateurs that have assisted their temporary partners more effectively than Plautus helped Molière in 'Amphitryon' and 'L'Avare. Is not the best act of the 'Psyché' of Molière the work of Corneille? It seems to me that a form of art to which we owe such works, which causes our drama to reign throughout the whole of Europe deserves something better than supercilious contempt, leaving alone the fact that a number of brilliant but incomplete intellects which, if left to their own resources would have remained barren, have been lifted out of themselves by that kind of association and proved the sufficiently novel rule in arithmetic that *twice one make three.*

No one, then, need be surprised at my taking up the cudgels for collaboration; I am indebted to it for three friends; Goubaux, Scribe and Labiche; and if the pieces I wrote by myself; 'Medée,' 'Par droit de conquête,' and 'Un jeune homme qui ne fait rien,' have not been less successful than the others it is probably because I remembered while writing them what I had learned during my collaboration with others.

Collaboration has at least this privilege, it arouses to a strange degree the curiosity of the outside world. Not once but a hundred times have I been asked: 'But how do two authors manage to write one piece; in what way is it constructed, in what way is it written?' I doubt whether I could give them a better idea of that method of work than by showing them a 'collaboration' in the act.

I had been married about three years and was constantly thinking of redeeming my failure when one morning my wife, while talking about some of her school friends, all of a sudden uttered the name of Clélie. 'Clélie,' I repeated, laughing, 'how does she come by that name? Is she a young Roman woman?' 'By birth, no, but in face and feeling, yes. Handsome, dark, tall, with a profile like that of an old medal and eyes both full of sweetness and courage, Clélie added to those energetic traits a kind of bantering spirit which she showed under rather curious circumstances.' 'Tell me all about it,' I said.

'The story is worth telling,' said my wife. 'She

had been married for something like four years to a Creole who was passionately fond of her, they were living in a nice country place at Vineuil near Chantilly. The old Prince de Bourbon was still alive and his magnificent hunts had made that part of the country famous. One day the stag having jumped the hedge of Clélie's garden, the whole of the pack, the huntsmen and some of the gentlemen of the hunt themselves followed suit and virtually enacted the fable of La Fontaine. Next morning, Clélie, whose husband happened to be absent at the time, wrote very politely, but at the same time very firmly to the Prince complaining of the damage that had been done and expressing the formal desire that the thing should not occur again. A week later there was another hunt and another invasion of her domicile. Clélie was sitting in her small drawing-room engaged with some embroidery when the servant came to tell her that the stag had leaped into the garden, that the pack had come after it, and that the huntsmen and the rest were tearing at full speed in the direction of the hedge. Clélie gets up very quietly, orders her servants to seize two of the handsomest hounds in the pack and, followed by her gardener who at her command has caught up his gun, proceeds to the hedge, holding her piece of embroidery. At the same moment two young fellows on horseback appear on the other side of the hedge. 'Stop gentlemen, I forbid you to come any further,' she says, still putting



in a stitch here and there. Great surprise of the two young fellows who begin to banter her in a good-natured way, urging their horses meanwhile to take the jump. 'If you move another step, gentlemen,' says Clélie, 'my gardener will fire on you without the slightest compunction. This is an absolute case of trespass,' she adds, laughing, 'and I have assuredly the right to defend myself. Oh, by-the-bye, before I forget, you may tell the Prince that I hold two of his best hounds as hostages.' After hesitating for a moment or so the young fellows lifted their hats and turned their horses' heads. The hunt had virtually been stopped, the stag 'got away' and the negotiations between the Prince and Clélie for the restitution of the two staghounds brought about a correspondence and a series of proposals, terminating amidst all the courtly graces of the *ancien régime*, with the appearance of Clélie in the Prince's drawing-rooms with all the honours of war thick upon her.

My wife's story had worked me up to such a pitch that I scarcely gave myself time to finish my breakfast. I rushed to my writing-table, and before night-fall I had built up and written the whole of a first act. Goubaux happening to come in to take 'pot-luck,' I read him what I had written during the day. 'The deuce,' he exclaimed, 'but there is sufficient material there for a five-act drama. That woman is a character, and on a character one can build up a drama.' 'Yes,' I replied, 'the thing is to find your



drama.' 'That's simple enough. You have only got to find some pathetic situation, calculated to bring into relief such a person, and after all, there are only two situations of that kind. Are we to depict her struggling against an intense passion, or contending with a great grief? Are we to paint her in the light of a victim, or of a guilty woman? If she have a lover. . . .' I left him no time to finish the sentence. 'No lover,' I exclaimed, 'I'll never consent to give her a lover. It would be tantamount to sully her character, and to convert her into a vulgar type. It would merely make us relapse into the hackneyed drama of the adulterous woman.' 'Very well,' remarked Goubaux laughing, 'but if you refuse to provide her with a lover, you'll have to provide her husband with a mistress. The interest would lie in the showing of a character like hers struggling with regret, sorrow, irritation, against the desire for vengeance; in short, in half-a-dozen aspects, to be decided on eventually.' 'That suits me better,' I said.

Thereupon, Goubaux turning to my wife began to question her. 'Tell me, madame,' he said, 'what was this Clélie like as a woman; what sort of man was her husband, and what sort of life did they lead together?' 'It was a very stormy life indeed. Though passionately fond of her, the husband let his imagination run riot; he was fickle and capricious like all Creoles, consequently his life was pretty well spent in deceiving his wife and in asking her pardon, but

on his bended knees and with tears, and sobs and promises not to repeat the offence, the whole accompanied by recurrent periods of conjugal passion, all the more ardent from their being complicated by remorse, and what was worse, sincere remorse.' 'And she?' 'She listened to it all, submitted to everything, with a mixture of dignity, intense grief and suppressed tears that made her like one of the women depicted by Corneille.'

'Well,' I exclaimed, 'here we have got the standpoint of our two characters, all we have got to do is to inflict upon her a sufficient amount of suffering in order to make her abandon her apparently calm attitude, to make her groan and shriek with rage and grief, in short, to make the faithlessness of the husband the leading motive of the play. We must prove, by a very vigorous dramatic action, that such faithlessness may be fraught with as much danger and lead to as many catastrophes as the faithlessness of the wife.' 'It is decidedly an excellent subject,' exclaimed Goubaux. 'In that case, let us set to work at once, my dear Goubaux, and just teach me my craft, by writing this piece with me.'

This, then, is the way in which the primary sketch of a piece is drawn by two authors working in conjunction, *it is virtually a conversation between these two on a given subject.* The one supplies the idea or the fact, the other discusses it with him, they get talking together, looking for ideas, suggesting to, and

contradicting one another ; the shock of two minds produces the fusion of ideas, and from the fusion springs the plan. When the plan is finished, it has to be carried out.

There are various ways of carrying out a plan sketched by two authors. In some instances, one of the authors undertakes to sketch the whole of the work, which the other fills in and finishes. In others the acts are divided between them ; the one writes the first two acts, the other the last three, the whole is revised by both.

Labiche and I wrote '*La Cigale chez les Fourmis*' without ever working together. One day I met him coming out of the Théâtre-Français, to the Committee of which he had just been reading a one-act comedy, entitled, '*Les Fourmis*.' He was dissatisfied and more or less hipped and offended. The Committee had accepted his piece, but lukewarmly not to say coldly, and solely because it was by him. 'The Committee is simply absurd,' he said, 'the piece is very amusing, and there is a capital part for Provost. I should like you to read it.' With which he hands me the piece. Two days later I gave him my opinion. 'My dear Labiche,' I said, laughing, 'I am inclined to side with the Committee. The first third of the piece is delightful, the rest should be rewritten. What you want in it is a young girl's part. Face to face with the frugal, saving ants, you want a lavish artist, a grasshopper.'—'Your idea

strikes me as excellent; will you rewrite the piece by yourself?'—'I can, at any rate, try. I leave for Cannes to-morrow, I'll take your manuscript with me and in a fortnight I'll show you what I have done.'

I returned in a fortnight, I showed him the piece; we read it to the Committee, it is accepted and played and we score a genuine success, on the occasion of which I composed the following small distich—

'Entre Labiche et moi la partie est égale ;  
Il a fait *les Fourmis* et j'ai fait *la Cigale*.'

Goubaux and I did the very reverse, but our collaboration was none the less curious. The new year's holidays being at hand, Goubaux publicly informed his pupils that he was going to take a short journey. The journey was very short indeed, for it merely consisted in his taking his dressing-bag and a change of linen from the Rue Blanche, where his school was situated, to my house in the Rue Saint-Marc where he took up his quarters in a small room adjoining the drawing-room. I, on my side, announced to all and sundry that we were going away for a week, and when we had lowered the blinds of the windows looking into the courtyard, we three, Goubaux, my wife and I were virtually isolated from the world, and our life of reclusion began.

At seven in the morning, we two, Goubaux and I, were in my study where we found the fire lighted, the

tea prepared and the mistress of the house enacting the part of Charlotte in 'Werther' to us, she was cutting bread and butter. After a quarter of an hour of cheerful gossip and laughter we set to work. Seated at the same writing table, opposite one another, we looked like a couple of schoolboys doing their lessons. We were positively in ecstasy with the thing. The most curious feature of the arrangement, perhaps, was that we began the same act at the beginning and at the same time. Starting from the pre-arranged plan, we began both at the first scenes, and in that way we wrote the first act, each bringing to the dialogue and to the portrayal of the characters his individuality of fancy or reflection. At mid-day we three breakfasted together, or rather we four, for my little daughter who was about two, made her appearance at that hour; and her wondering looks, her plump little cheeks, her dress, a masterpiece of maternal taste and coquettishness, her earnest demeanour as she sat in her high chair, the drollery of her answers, (children have the knack of enunciating such unexpected ideas, as to give one the impression that they have really a sense of humour) constituted one of the amusing parts of the breakfast. It was strictly forbidden to speak of or to allude to our work during the meals, which prohibition did not prevent my wife from noticing with a smile, our anxious or beaming looks and to deduct from them favourable prognostications or the reverse. After breakfast we had an



hour's music, which had the effect of soothing our minds, while at the same time it served as a reward and as an encouragement or stimulant to further exertions. There is a mysterious bond between all the arts. A melodious piece of music often has the effect of inspiring you with a happy line, and during that period of work Weber or Beethoven or Schubert has often assisted me in overcoming a difficulty in this or that scene.

At the end of ten days, Goubaux's holidays being about to expire and our two acts being finished, we summoned the reading committee, which committee was composed of my wife. 'I am assuming the functions of Laforêt,\* she said, settling herself comfortably in an armchair with her embroidery. We each brought our exercises, and she added laughing, 'Little boy Goubaux, let us hear what you have done.'

The double lecture led to many interruptions. It was I who exclaimed now and then while listening to Goubaux, 'Well done, that's better than mine.' 'Don't influence the Court,' said my wife gravely. And the Court, after having heard both sides and being asked to state which of the acts she preferred answered, 'I fancy I prefer them both; both have amused me, but not in the same places. The beginning of the piece seems to me more striking in M.

\* Molière's servant, to whom he is said to have read his plays while composing them.—TR.

Goubaux's manuscript, but the end of the same has pleased me better in M. Ernest Legouvé's. I like the woman's part better in the one and the father's part better in the other. It strikes me that by fusing the two versions into one we'll get a perfect union like ours.'

'This is Solomon's wisdom unalloyed,' exclaimed M. Goubaux; 'and as I have to resume my collar to-morrow, Legouvé will accomplish the union.'

So said so done. We spent the winter in finishing the piece and in the beginning of spring went to Eugène Sue to read it to him. He placed himself at his easel in order to listen to us, for he professed to be able to listen best when painting.

The effect produced was both excellent and disastrous at the same time. The first three acts were voted a great success, the other two considered execrable. No amount of corrections, of improvements, of excision would mend them, they had simply to be put aside and new ones written in their stead. All the pluck had been taken out of us, and four months elapsed during which we cudgelled our brains in vain for a new solution. We were beginning to give up all hope of success, when unexpected aid, a providential auxiliary, got us out of our difficulty. Who and what was that auxiliary? A third collaborateur. Who was that third collaborateur? A very curious personage who often comes to the aid of authors who, as a rule, invoke no one's aid, and of whom, the

personage, it would therefore be well to say a few words in this chapter on collaboration. The individual's name is 'Chance.'

Chance, in fact, plays a great part in dramatic conceptions. A word picked up at random, a book one happens to read, a person one happens to meet, may suggest all at once the very idea for which one has been looking in vain.

In 1849, Emile Augier was superintending the rehearsals of 'Gabrielle,' at the Théâtre-Français. All went well until the fifth act, when the whole seemed to come to a sudden stop. Both authors and actors felt the necessity of some vigorous, unforeseen situation, in order to put life into that act. Augier cudgelled his brain to no purpose, he could find nothing. One morning he is strolling along the Quai des Saint-Pères, when on reaching the Pont des Arts, he notices in front of him, and looking at the 'Institute,' a man of about forty, accompanied by his little daughter. Owing to the early hour, the bridge was almost deserted, and the child, finding herself unhampered in her movements, ran on in front, then came back to her father, flung herself into his arms, while he lifted her up to kiss her amidst her pleasant laughter and her embraces. The picture was absolutely delightful, and Augier, who had been watching them, could not help exclaiming, 'Bravo.' The gentleman was none other than the chief interpreter of 'Gabrielle,' M. Regnier, the little girl was his

daughter. 'Have you any children, Sir Ambassador?' (*Êtes vous père, monsieur l'ambassadeur?*)<sup>\*</sup> asked the artist in response to Augier's 'Bravo.' 'No I have only my sister's children,' replied the dramatist. They stand talking for a moment or so, and each goes his respective way, the poet musing upon the picture he had just seen. The gambols of the little one, the two faces, their looks, their laughter, had suddenly evoked such a vivid image of paternal tenderness, as to show him his fifth act in an altogether new light. The father of the piece all at once assumes grandiose proportions which is the very thing wanted for the *dénouement*, and the author goes home to write one of the most touching scenes of the modern drama. I only quote the beginning of it :

' Nous n'existons vraiment que par ces petits êtres  
 Qui dans tout notre cœur s'établissent en maîtres,  
 Qui prennent notre vie et ne s'en doutent pas,  
 Et n'ont qu'à vivre heureux pour n'être point ingrats.'

Now, there is no doubt that a man must be an Augier to draw such lines from such a meeting ; a great many dramatists might have come that way on that morning, and their fifth act would still have been in limbo, but to Emile Augier the Pont des Arts has really been the short cut to the Académie-Française.

Well, it was by a similar accident, by a letter I found unexpectedly, by a story with which I had

<sup>\*</sup> The question of Henri IV to the Spanish ambassador, when the latter entered the room and found him playing 'at horses' with his children.—TR.

been mixed up and which suddenly recurred to my mind, that I was inspired. But the story is too striking, it has left too great a landmark in my life not to give it in full.

## II

I was in Rome in 1832. I was only twenty-five and became acquainted with a Frenchman, a little older than myself, but to whom I took a great liking on account of his energetic temperament and his original turn of mind. Tall, robust, somewhat full-blooded, with a black beard and very light blue eyes his appearance produced the usual strange effects of those contrasts. M. Auguste Leroux went shooting in the neighbourhood of Rome with Horace Vernet, practised fencing with Constantin, the celebrated painter on porcelain, painted very nicely himself and brought back from his shooting expeditions as many pretty water colours as game, spent his money 'like a lord' and was absolutely weary of everything. He had a natural, hereditary tendency to spleen, which, it should be said, was fully justified by a terrible event that had befallen him in his youth. One morning his father while sitting at breakfast with his son and his daughter, got up from the table without saying a word, and a few minutes afterwards the children heard the report of a pistol. As a matter of course they rushed out of the room, and at about a score of steps from the door found their father lying



dead. He had blown his brains out. The catastrophe cast a shadow on the young fellow's life ; he often said to me : ' I'll finish up like my father.'

On our return from Italy our cordial intercourse soon changed into friendship. He introduced me to his sister, whom he worshipped, and whose children he positively idolised. Their father's tragic death had drawn the bond between them still closer. They had been drawn together by fear as well as affection. He had also introduced me to his dearest or rather to his then only friend, M. G. Delacour. M. Delacour, after having spent many years in the service of his country had retired with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. He had inherited a considerable fortune, and at the age of forty-five married a poor but marvellously good-looking young girl. I have never seen a more striking contrast between man and wife. The husband was simple to a degree, even somewhat stern, but one of those noble, kindly natures which shrink from speech, and are content to let their deeds speak for themselves. M. Delacour reminded me of some of those military characters of the first Republic, so frequently met with at that period. As for the wife, she was like a picture by Watteau, tiny, plump, with rosy cheeks and saucy eyes, teeth that were so white as to be a smile in themselves, two ever-shifting dimples at the corners of the mouth, and such a throat, bust and arms ! In short, a delightful mixture of little fairy, little doll and Parisienne.

The almost inevitable consequences of such a union may easily be guessed—Mme. Delacour deceived her husband. He discovered her faithlessness and consulted his friend. ‘You have but one course open to you,’ was the advice, ‘to kill the lover and discard the wife.’ ‘The lover is gone.’ ‘The wife remains, turn her out of your house.’ But M. Delacour happened to be madly in love, the wife wept, flung herself at his feet, promised amendment, the husband was willing to forgive, M. Leroux alone remained inflexible. ‘If you pardon her to-day, she will recommence to-morrow. If I were you, I should put her away,’ he said.

Two or three days later, on leaving his friend’s room, he found himself face to face in the adjacent room with the wife who had been watching for him. ‘I would like to speak with you, monsieur,’ she said. ‘I am at your service, madame,’ saying which he follows her into a small drawing-room, the door of which she closes behind her. Then she goes straight up to him, looks him full in the face and says: ‘Why this merciless attitude against me, monsieur, what have I done to you?’ ‘What have you done to me,’ he replies, quivering with suppressed anger, ‘why, all the harm you have done to him, you have done to me. Why my merciless attitude? Because I hate and despise you, because I look upon you as the most wretched creature on earth for having deceived a man who dragged you out of your poverty,

almost saved you from starvation, and who cherished you as a brother, a father and a lover at the same time, who is one of the noblest hearted men I know, who has all the delicate feelings of a woman added to all the energies of a man ; I hate you for having virtually plunged the dagger into the breast of so kind a creature. It shows that you have neither heart nor feeling. It is out of pity and affection for him, from horror for you that I am bent upon your downfall. Good-bye, madame,' he says, leaving the room.

Left to herself, crushed beneath the withering blast of his words, she felt all of a sudden springing up within her one of those terrible, instantaneous revolts which remind one of one of those instances of 'fate' depicted by the Greek dramatists. She rose from her seat, reeled forward a few steps, and dropped into another chair, exclaiming, 'Great heavens, I love that man !' Nothing could have been more true. She loved that man, she loved him for his hatred and contempt of her, she loved him for his having told her of both. His indignant denunciation of her ingratitude had shed a halo around him ; she looked upon him as a being of a superior order ; henceforth she had but one thought, one wish, to confess everything to him ; to fling herself at his feet, imploring him to kill her, while exclaiming : 'Strike, strike, I worship the hand that shall deal the blow.' A few days elapsed before she was enabled to carry out her

plan. Finally, one morning when he called upon her husband, she confronted him and without the slightest preamble, without a moment's hesitation, in a terrible burst of sobs, headlong passion, horror of herself and adoration of him, this tiny creature, whom Fragonard might have chosen for a model, expressed her love in passionate accents, the like of which for pathos Alfred de Musset never found under his pen. From her he came straight to my house. I was out and he left word that he would call next morning. When he entered the room he looked so pale, so utterly undone that I could not help remarking upon it. He told me what had happened. His story positively terrified me, I beheld 'as in a glass darkly' such a horrible future in store for him that I cried out : 'Go, go to America, to Africa, the farther the better. Go away, friend, or you are lost. The conflagration is gaining upon you, you are under the impression that you are merely disarmed, that you are moved with pity, it is nothing of the kind ; you are in love.' 'I,' he exclaimed, starting from his chair in sheer bewilderment ; 'I, but that would be too abominable to contemplate. After all I have said, after all I have done, after all I feel for him. No, no; it is impossible, it would be worse than a crime.' 'You never spoke a truer word. And it is exactly on that account that you are struck to the very heart. You are greatly mistaken if you think that human nature is invariably beautiful and noble. If you doubt my word go and

ask half-a-dozen priests, priests whose duty takes them to the confessional. You are in love, just as much as she is, perhaps more than she is. Take my advice and go away.'

This was at the beginning of June and next day I went with my family to Dieppe. I had had no news for a week, when, on my return from bathing one morning, I found Leroux at our lodgings. 'You here,' I said, horrified at the change a week had wrought in his looks. 'What has happened?' 'You told me to go away,' he answered in a painful tone, 'well, I have come to take refuge with you; give me shelter. The sight of your wife and child, of your domestic peace and happiness will allay my excitement. Thank God, I have as yet nothing to reproach myself with. I have not said a word to her. I have come to seek near you the strength to remain silent for ever.'

He stayed for a fortnight and I shall never forget our excursions to the forest of Arques. My wife, he and I got on to our horses after breakfast and for hours together rode through the wild and solitary country, amidst the magnificent giant-beeches along the crest of the rocks overlooking the rustic valley watered by the Sorgues. His head almost touching his horse's mane, he scarcely ever uttered a word. His silence was so painful as to become contagious, it weighed us down. We ourselves felt reluctant to speak, moved as we were by this sombre image of



despair and by the expectation of some tragic and mysterious catastrophe.

A letter he received while he was with us affected him intensely. His sister occupied the ground floor of a small house, standing in its own gardens in the Temple quarter. One day she wrote to her brother that a charming young woman had called on her and proposed to take the first floor, that in the course of the negotiations she had become acquainted with the children both of whom she had smothered with kisses, 'having evidently taken an affectionate liking to them. She has even made them some trifling presents,' added the sister, 'and they were offered in such a sweet and delicate way that it was impossible to refuse them. Her emotion gives me the impression of being prompted by some recollection.'

The young woman was none other than the unhappy Mme. Delacour, who being frantic with grief at the departure of the man she worshipped, had taken to prowling around the house in order to catch a glimpse of the two children as they went in and out, in order to get to speak to them and to inspire them with a liking for her. All this was done with the hope that he would come to hear of it from his sister and that his heart would be touched.

We left Dieppe together, he to return to Paris, we to return to our modest country house. A month later, I learnt from his own lips that all I had foreseen, had come to pass. They had met one another

face to face once more, their mad passion had been too much for them, the husband had become cognisant of the affair and as the result of a scene between the two men, Leroux had offered him the satisfaction due under such circumstances. 'I'll not fight you,' the husband had chillingly replied, 'it would afford you too much gratification. Twenty years of service devoted to my country give me the right to choose my own mode of vengeance. I leave you to one another.'

The punishment came ere long. Leroux, bent upon giving the young woman the life of luxury she had grown used to since her marriage flung himself headlong into speculations which seriously impaired his fortune. They were compelled to retire to that country house near Compiègne where his father had killed himself. For two months he left me without a word.

Getting very anxious, I wrote to him telling him among other things of a comedy which I was projecting for the ensuing winter. I transcribe his reply textually: 'So my secretive friend is finishing a comedy of which until now he had never broached a word to me. To punish him I ought to have gone to the first night with a whistle, but honestly I could not very well be present at that première. *To-morrow I am going to kill myself together with my executioner.* If you could see me, you would not know me, for my hair is as white as snow. On a very

plausible pretext I have managed to stow away in a small pavilion at the end of the garden about thirty fagots of wood and several bottles of turpentine. At eleven o'clock to-morrow night, we'll walk into that pavilion, she and I, with our minds made up to die and agreed as to the necessity of doing so. I'll pour the turpentine on the fagots and set light to them, after which I'll blow her brains out with a pistol and do the same thing for myself. Goodbye, may you be happy in this world, I am going to find out whether there is another.'

What had happened during the time I had had no tidings from him? What had been the terrible phases of that tragic passion? Why had his hair grown white, and why did he call her his executioner? More than bewildered myself, I went post haste to Compiègne : everything was over. I gathered from the servants and neighbours a few particulars of their last days, which after a lapse of more than half-a-century, I cannot write down without my pen trembling between my fingers.

M. Leroux had made up his mind to put an end to everything by committing suicide. In order to have his hands free he told her to go to Paris to make some purchases, but she suspected his intentions, and vowed that henceforth she would not stir from his side for a single moment, being determined to die with him.

M. Leroux being very fond of shooting was neces-

sarily a great walker ; she on the contrary was very delicate and tiny, and like the majority of women born and bred in Paris, unable to stand the fatigue of a couple of hours' walk. One morning, soon after daybreak, while he thought her still asleep, he started for the forest, his gun loaded with ball cartridge. Five minutes afterwards, at the bend of a path, he found her waiting for him. In a kind of frenzy, he started at a gallop across the woods ; she followed him, panting for breath, almost choking, lacerating her feet among the brambles, but keeping up with him nevertheless, never losing sight of him. For full an hour they went on, at the end of which she stumbled, but still clinging to him and saying that she would not leave him, and that if he wanted to kill himself, he would have to kill her first. On that day they conceived their plan. Their last hours on earth must have been terrible. They sat down to breakfast at twelve and remained there opposite one another, gloomy and silent. When the servants came to lay the cloth for dinner, the breakfast had not been touched. At nine o'clock, M. Leroux told them that they might retire for the night, and the unhappy couple were alone once more, with one solitary candle between them. At eleven one of the servants heard someone stir in the dining-room, he jumped out of bed, opened his window and looked out. He saw the window which almost reached the level of the garden being opened, and his master and

mistress climb out of it. Then they went straight to the kennel of a big dog, unfastened him and took his chain. After which M. Leroux locked the front door and flung the key over the wall. In another moment, the couple went up the large avenue of lime trees leading to a small summer house. The servant caught a glimpse of them now and then through the gaps in the trees; as they crossed the paths, fitful patches of moonlight filtering through the branches gave them the appearance of a couple of spectres, or rather of a couple of convicts, for the dog's chain was fastened to the right wrist of the one and the left wrist of the other. At last they disappeared from his view altogether, and after listening for a little while, and hearing no further sound the man went back to bed and fell asleep. An hour later, perhaps, he awoke with a start, the dog was barking violently and there was a crash of falling timbers, accompanied by the crackling of burning wood. The pavilion was on fire. He rushed down, the neighbours scaled the walls, and appeared upon the scene almost as soon as he, but too late, the place was simply ablaze. Among the ashes and charred posts was found part of the shoulder of the young woman and a wrist with the end of the iron chain round it. The rest of those two human beings, worthy of pity in spite of their error, had disappeared in the flames and with them the explanation of that



enigmatical and terrible phrase, 'To-morrow I am going to kill myself with my executioner.'

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Apparently we have drifted far away from my poor play ; apparently only, for we have just got back to it. The tragic story related above had recurred to me in all its details at the unexpected sight of Leroux's letter among some old papers. The story haunted me all day, and towards evening, by one of those phenomena of the imagination, though frequent enough with dramatic writers, the real drama got gradually mixed up in my mind with the fictitious one, the *dénouement* of which was persistently eluding my grasp. One of the three personages stood out from the other two and began to form a part of my group of actors. It was the personage of the colonel, whose answer : 'No, monsieur, I will not fight you,' struck me all at once as the summary of a whole character, as the germ of a dramatic part, as the starting point of an altogether new situation from which two acts might be evolved. Brimful of my idea, I went post haste to Goubaux's, he was away from home, he was on duty as a national guard at the Ministry of Finances. To the Ministry of Finances I ran, Goubaux was on guard. I tell him of my find, which he thinks admirable. 'In that case,' I say, 'let us set to work at once.' 'I can't,' he replies, 'I have to keep the

dogs away, and challenge the people who want to go in.' 'What does that matter, it will be all the more amusing.' And forthwith we set to planning our act, he striding up and down, his rifle on his shoulder, I running by his side on the pavement, our conversation interrupted every now and then by the 'No admittance here,' of the sentry.

By the time they came to relieve him, our plan had taken shape, and two months after that our piece was finished. In another two months we read it at the Comédie-Française, where it was unanimously and enthusiastically accepted. Mdlle. Mars undertook the principal part and on the 6th June 1838 I had the satisfaction of reading on the playbills: 'To-night for the first time, "Louise de Lignerolles," a drama in five acts, and in prose.' My heart beat very fast when I read that title on the walls, not so fast, though, as when I read that of 'Le Soleil Couchant.'

The predictions with regard to 'Louise de Lignerolles' were more favourable. I had gathered two very valuable ones the night before at the dress rehearsal; the first from Casimir Delvaigne. 'It is very brutal, but striking; it will succeed,' he said, when the rehearsal was over. My second prophet was an old actor who played the minor comic parts. His name was Faure. In his young days, he had given proof of great courage. It was at Nantes in 1794, at the time when Carrier had the people drowned in

batches in the Loire. Entering the Hotel-de-Ville one day, he caught sight of the bust of that fiend, and snatching it from its plinth, he flung it to the ground where it was shattered to pieces. 'That's what ought to be done to the wretch himself,' he shouted. He was advised to leave the town as quickly as he could; and he came back to Paris, where he resumed his very modest position at the Comédie-Française. 'Monsieur,' he said after the dress rehearsal of our drama, 'you may make your mind easy. Your success is assured; all the petticoats will come and see your piece, and wherever the petticoats go the breeches invariably follow.'

Both predictions were realised to the letter. At midnight on the 6th June '38 the names of Prosper Goubaux and Ernest Legouvé, 'the authors of the drama we have just had the honour of performing before you,' to quote Firmin's own words were greeted with unanimous applause. I had taken my revenge for the failure of 'Le Soleil Couchant' and could claim the title of dramatic author.

## CHAPTER III

The four Principal Interpreters of 'Louise de Lignerolles'; Mdlle. Mars, Firmin, and Geffroy Joanny.—The combined Ages of the two Lovers.—Firmin.—Firmin compared to his Successor; Delaunay.—Firmin's Appearance and Gait.—His Style as compared to that of Delaunay.—The Byplay in Love.—Avowals Then and Now.—No more Kneeling at the beloved Woman's feet.—Firmin's Want of Memory.—His Devices to minimise the evil effects of it.—His last Years and Death.—Joanny.—His Peculiarities.—His Punctuality.—Expects the same from his Fellow-Actors.—'I have a Chicken for Dinner which cannot wait, etc.'—His Ante-Theatrical Career.—His magnificent Style.—His Politeness.—Geffroy.—M. Legouvé selects him to play a part in his Piece in preference to his older and more experienced fellow-actors.—He becomes Famous in one evening.—Mdlle. Mars.—'Was she Pretty?'—'Am I Pretty?'—Beauty On and Off the Stage.—Refuses to play any but Young Girl's Parts.—Her Reasons.—Her Artistic Merits.—Her Love Affairs.—An Anecdote of her Early Life.—Mdlle. Contat and the Black Thread.—The Use of Slang on the contemporary stage.—Sardou's first Attempt to introduce it.—Mdlle. Mars as a Dramatic Adviser.—The Success of 'Louise de Lignerolles.'—Mdlle. Mars afraid of Mdlle. Rachel.—Her reluctance to tell her Age.—Her last Years.—Her Deathbed.—Exit.—'The Ruling Passion strong in Death.'

### I

WHEN the curtain rose for the first time on 'Louise de Lignerolles,' the two lovers of the play counted a hundred and twenty-five years of existence between them. Yet, I may safely say, that I have never had

two such young interpreters, if by youth we understand spirited, passionate and heartfelt acting.

There is a vast difference between the Comédie-Française of 1838 and that of 1887 and all the advantages are certainly not on the side of the contemporary organisation. At present, even in comedy, the scenery and dresses are more carefully looked to, the animation of a drawing-room, the movement of the minor characters is better, there is greater anxiety to catch the true accent of every day life, but what has become of the diction, the elegant manners, the refined language, and the hundred and one things which made the Comédie-Française the faithful image of French society as it existed in years gone by. I will endeavour to signalise some of those differences by showing four of the great artists at work : namely, Mdlle. Mars, Firmin, Geffroy and Joanny.

Let us start with Firmin, whom I cannot portray better than by comparing him to our dearly missed Delaunay. They had many qualities in common, and first of all the look, or it would be better, perhaps, to term it the glance. On the stage we must not confound the look with the eyes. One may have very expressive looks with very small eyes, and *per contra*, one may have very large eyes and still be utterly lacking in that flash of light which springs from the pupil, spreads in one moment throughout the house and as it were illumines it. Both had



dazzling white teeth, which seemed to sparkle like the eyes, and to smile like the lips. Shorter than Delaunay and without so shapely a figure, less elegant in its movements, Firmin, with his head slightly 'stuck' forward, his body swaying more or less on his legs, and beating his palms nervously against one another, had not the charming grace of Perdican, but the impassioned fire of his acting, the electrical effect of his voice made up for it all. To find a fit comparison to him we must go back to the great tenors such as Rubini and David, who not only touched one's soul, but made every nerve in one's body quiver like the strings of a harp. Impassioned as was Delaunay, Firmin had something more of 'the devil in him,' and was with it all as light as a bird. There are some lines from 'Le Misanthrope' in which piece I heard them both, in which both delighted me, and in which I was enabled to appreciate the similarity of and the difference between their respective talents. They are the lines of the Marquis (Acaste) at the beginning of the third act. In order to explain my idea, I had better quote the verses.

' Parbleu ! Je ne vois pas lorsque je m'examine,  
Où prendre aucun sujet d'avoir l'âme chagrine,  
J'ai du bien, je suis jeune, et sors d'une maison  
Qui peut se dire noble avec quelque raison ;  
Et je crois par le rang que me donne ma race,  
Qu'il est fort peu d'emplois dont je ne sois en passe.  
Pour le cœur, dont surtout nous devons faire cas,  
On sait, sans vanité, que je n'en manque pas ;  
Et l'on m'a vu pousser, dans le monde, une affaire

D'une assez vigoureuse et gaillarde manière.  
Pour de l'esprit, j'en ai, sans doute, et du bon goût,  
A juger sans étude et raisonner de tout ;  
A faire aux nouveautés, dont je suis idolâtre,  
Figure de savant sur les bancs du théâtre,  
Y décider en chef, et faire du fracas,  
A tous les beaux endroits qui méritent des ahs !  
Je suis assez adroit ; j'ai bon air, bonne mine,  
Les dents belles surtout, et la taille fort fine,  
Quand à se mettre bien, je crois, sans me flatter,  
Qu'on serait mal venu de me le disputer.  
Je me vois dans l'estime autant qu'on y puisse être. ;  
Fort aimé du beau sexe, et bien auprès du maître ;  
Je crois qu'avec cela, mon cher marquis, je croi  
Qu'on peut, par tout pays, être content de soi.'

This charming piece, on Delaunay's lips, sparkled like a lark's mirror in the sun.\* So many lines, so many facets. The faintest intention, the vaguest hint, the most delicate nuance of the author's meaning was elucidated and put into proper relief. Firmin, on the other hand, laid stress upon nothing, did not stop to accentuate or emphasise, but carried the whole in a single movement which was like a flutter of wings, like the buzzing flight of a swarm of bees.

Firmin had made himself famous by the manner in which he told a woman of his love. No one could fling himself at the feet of a woman with as much passion as he. Nowadays, men no longer fling themselves at a woman's feet. I believe I was the last dramatic author who was bold enough to introduce that bit of pantomime in a comedy. Bressant,

\* The author uses the word 'miroir à alouettes' ; literally a mirror with which larks are caught. I have seen them used in France, but, though told that they are employed in England, never seen them here.

when telling Mme. Madeleine Brohan of his love in 'Par droit de conquête,' gracefully knelt before her, and at the same time electrified the audience by his passionate pleading. When a few years later, M. Febvre assumed the part he told me that he could not possibly follow Bressant's example, that he did not know *how to set about that kind of thing*, that he would simply feel ridiculous—and he was right. The taste 'for that kind of thing' had changed. To throw one's self at a woman's feet, to kiss her hand, to pay her a compliment, all 'that kind of thing' dated from a period when love was accompanied by respect, when a certain show of gallantry was an essential element in the act of 'paying one's court.' I defy any man, in our own days, to make 'a declaration of love' on the stage, as we understood it then. The public would split its sides with laughter, and the young woman or girl to whom it was addressed would follow suit, if she did not take the initiative. In order to convince her of your affection, you must provoke her more or less, I had almost said treat her more or less cavalierly. If one had proposed such a scene to Firmin he would have said like M. Febvre: '*I do not know how to set about that kind of thing.*'

It seems scarcely credible but this very brilliant actor had no memory, When enacting a long scene at the far end of the stage, he was obliged to have a second prompter somewhere within earshot. He invented the strangest devices in order to refresh his

memory. Sometimes he would select this or that armchair, at others, part of the design of the carpet, then again this or that lamp to help him out with a hemistich or a line which was sure to escape him at the moment he wanted it. How did he manage to suit his spirited, his impressive style to those frightful lapses of memory? How? Simply by making those lapses contribute to those bursts of passion. Like Molé, whose memory was as defective as his, he drew from his struggle with the text indescribable effects; he appeared to be dragging his words from his very entrails, his stammering and stuttering simply became so much quivering, headlong passion. His impetuosity was, after all, so thoroughly natural that during the run of 'Hernani' the slightest whisper against the piece sufficed to call it forth. Though thoroughly worn out with the duties of this crushing part, he would start to his feet and overwhelm the hostile critic with the most striking passages from his rôle, rendered, if possible, with additional fire and spirit. Odd to relate, this excitable, highly strung creature spent his old age like a philosopher and ended up like a stoic. Having retired from the stage, he lived for many years in a small country cottage on the banks of the Seine near Coudray, by himself, smiling and contented, spending his days in reading Plutarch. 'When my friends come to see me I am delighted. When they stay away I manage to do without them,' he said. When deep in the seventies, he

felt that his sight began to fail him, he could read no longer, his legs refused to carry him and a profound but mute melancholy took possession of his soul and showed itself in his features, and one day without having ever uttered a word of complaint, he painfully and slowly got on to the window sill in his drawing-room, which was situated on the first floor and flung himself head foremost on to the pavement below, just as quietly, in fact, as a follower of Zeno would have plunged a dagger into his breast.

Joanny, who like Firmin, contributed greatly to the success of 'Louise de Lignerolles,' was a singular artist in more senses than one. To begin with, he always knew the whole of his part at the first rehearsal of no matter what new work. He brought his manuscript in his pocket to mark the corrections and alterations, but from the very first day the whole of the text was indelibly stamped on his memory.

A vast difference assuredly between this principle of being 'letter perfect' from the very beginning, and the theory of some great actors of to-day who pretend that a part should be learned on the stage during rehearsal, and during rehearsal only. Who is right? He, or they? Perhaps both: it is simply a question of school and period. Formerly when diction was considered the first and foremost thing, Joanny's method was the better. To-day the dialogue is as it were mixed up with the gestures, the position of the actor on the stage thoroughly modifies the accent of the



phrases, actors do not only play a part, they 'walk it,' I was tempted to say 'run it.' In Sardou's '*Bourgeois de Pontarcy*' ('Duty' in the English version), I have heard and seen Mdlle. Bartet and M. Berton exchange the most tender and purest protestations of love, walking all the while round the furniture. I feel bound to add that the whole of it was accomplished with infinite grace and charm. Admitting that kind of pantomime to be the right thing, the method of learning one's part while enacting it at rehearsal must be the better one, but when the characters in the play were animated without being agitated, Joanny's method was preferable.

His second original trait was his punctuality. Having been a sailor in his early days, (he had lost two fingers of his left hand in battle), he made his appearance at rehearsal to the minute, just as he would have done on the fo'c'sle or quarter-deck of his ship. But if he kept no one waiting for him, he equally declined to wait for any one. I remember perfectly well his pulling out his watch one day at a rehearsal of '*Louise de Lignerolles*.' We were in the middle of a scene, but that did not affect him. 'One moment,' he said very quickly, 'it's five o'clock; if we had begun at the right hour we should have finished long ago. My housekeeper has got me a chicken for my dinner, I won't let my housekeeper or the chicken wait, so I wish you a pleasant afternoon.' I wonder what poor Joanny would say nowadays to the want

of punctuality which has become one of the traditions of 'the House of Molière,' where every watch is half-an-hour slow. The old hands still manage to be punctual, but the young ones, and especially the women, seem to take a pride in keeping people waiting. Who is to blame? Not one in particular; it is simply the prevailing spirit. The idea of submitting to discipline, of being bound by regulations has gone out of fashion. People no longer care to be part of a whole, there is no longer a *milky way* in the domain of art; everybody wishes to be a star, and as such moves at his own sweet will, rotates by himself, or if anything makes others revolve around him. I have got an idea that this system is no more suitable on the earth than it would be in the skies.

Finally, Joanny had a third peculiarity, he lisped. Of all the drawbacks to good diction, lisping is undoubtedly the one lending itself most to laughter. Well, this lisper, this methodical, systematical creature was one of the most heartstirring, original and poetical artists I have known. Unfortunately for him, he was the contemporary of Talma. The proximity of men of genius is fatal to the man of talent. The former monopolise all the available glory of their time. The splendid light they shed reduces to a mere flicker everything that but for them would be considered brilliant. Joanny, relegated to the Odéon for a long while, only entered the Comédie-Française after the death of his illustrious rival, and suddenly

assumed a foremost position. Who does not remember his Tyrrel in 'Les Enfants d'Edouard,' his Coictier in 'Louis XI,' and above all, his Ruy Gomez in 'Hernani.' His magnificent white hair looked like a halo. He disliked wigs. 'Wigs are made of dead hair,' he said, 'only the hair growing on our heads and nourished with our blood can associate itself with the play of our features. It enacts our parts as we enact them.'

As the father of Louise de Lignerolles, he aroused the enthusiasm of Mdlle. Mars to such a degree that one day while rehearsing the fifth act, she said to me, 'Do you hear the old lion?' The praise was the more gratifying to me inasmuch as I had, to a certain extent, contributed to that magnificent roar. During the first rehearsals I had not been particularly pleased with Joanny in that scene. I considered that he did not display all the energy required by the situation. But how was I to tell him so? I was but thirty and he had white hair. I had not the courage. Then I bethought myself of going to him after the rehearsal and while pretending to be enraptured with his rendering of the scene, to repeat the whole of it, *ostensibly as he rendered it*, in reality as I wanted it rendered. He listened very attentively, looked at me without saying a word and went away. Next day at rehearsal I was in the balcony. When Joanny came to that scene he reproduced exactly every one of my intonations, then turning to me and bow-

ing with infinite grace, he said, 'Will that do, M. l'auteur ?'

I should indeed be wanting in gratitude if I did not say a few words about M. Geffroy, before speaking of Mdlle. Mars. To begin with, I have a weakness for his talent and for a very good reason ; I, as it were, guessed that it was in him before anyone else. The part of M. de Givry, the colonel who refuses to 'go out' had met with enthusiastic approval at the reading of the play, they offered us ever so many *sociétaires* and tried artists to interpret it. 'No,' I repeated obstinately, 'I want the young fellow I saw in *'La Famille de Lusigny,'* he alone is able to give with the necessary pluck the words of Colonel Givry when he appears upon the scene for the first time in the fourth act.

As a matter of fact, the line involved a very, very great risk. The first words he had to say to Henri de Lignerolles were, 'Monsieur, you are the lover of my wife.' Nowadays such a commencement would scarcely be considered very daring, but it was different in 1838. I remember well enough the murmur of revolt that ran through the house. The pit rose as one man, or rather like a horse that gets on its hind legs. It was only what I expected. During the rehearsals, all the actors, Mdlle Mars included, had entreated me in vain to 'cut the line.' 'You are compromising the piece.' 'I don't care,' was my answer. 'You are virtually invoking a perfect storm

of hisses.' 'I don't care.' 'But at any rate, do prepare your public for that exhibition of brutality.' 'No, there's no time to do that. We are in the fourth act and we must define the colonel's character with one line. That line has an immense advantage, it is the character "boiled down" to one sentence. The whole of the part is contained in it. The public will probably hiss for the moment, but you'll see what they'll do afterwards.'

My view turned out to be the correct one. I had instinctively established two rules, essential under such conditions. The first is that a daring thing should be done boldly. Precautions in such a case only tend to put the public on its guard, and show that the author is afraid of it. Now, it is a fact that a theatrical audience is simply like any other gathering of men, it is impossible to manage it except by showing a bold front. The only way to impose on it is by imposing on one's self. The second rule, which since then Scribe has loudly proclaimed, is that a theatrical effect is produced not by a blow but by the counter-blow. In 'Louise de Lignerolles' the blow had been very violent, but at the fourth line after it came the counter-blow which served, as it were, as a vaulting-plank by means of which to jump clean over the former. When M. de Givry brutally claimed his wife, hidden in Henri de Lignerolles' rooms, the lover said, 'And if she were here, do you think I should be coward enough to give her up?'—'You



have been coward enough to corrupt her,' retorted the colonel. And this telling retort—Goubaux's invention, not mine—was the signal for deafening applause which continued throughout. The part was one prolonged, triumphant success of which M. Geffroy had his well-deserved share, for he showed himself in advance of his time by that careful attention to detail in the matter of dress, manner and bearing, which constituted one of his great talents. With his heavy moustache, closely cropped reddish hair, turning grey and standing on end, his cavalry stride, his voice cutting through one like steel, his brief answers that reminded one of the crack of a whip, he positively made one feel afraid. You should have seen him when Henri de Lignerolles said, 'Monsieur de Givry, you are a coward.' Taking a long breath, he burst into a low sarcastic chuckle, and simply answered, 'Do you think so?' At eight o'clock in the evening M. Geffroy was a 'mere hope,' at midnight he was an actor of acknowledged talent.

## II

'Was she pretty?' That is generally the first question people ask you when you happen to speak of an artist of former days. Well, Mdlle. Mars was pretty, she was even charming. So charming, in fact, that Scribe in 'Valérie' dared to put on her own lips the words, 'Am I pretty?' She was close upon forty-five then, and the public replied to her by

applauding to a man. That applause, I feel bound to say, was due to a certain extent to the spirit of the times. At present an author would scarcely care to risk such an experiment ; it would want the gallants of the pit of the early twenties to score a similar success. I will go further still and say that without the 'optical conditions' of the playhouse, the experiment might not have succeeded then. There are what we call stage beauties. Mdlle. Mars, in spite of her handsome eyes and magnificent teeth, would not have passed muster, off the stage, as a good-looking woman. Her complexion was neither one thing nor the other, her nose was rather coarse, her head somewhat large, and her figure more or less short. But the stage is a magician with the power of transforming everything. If it be true that extra-refined features become somewhat indistinct, it is also true that too strongly marked traits become more or less toned down. The stage both magnifies and reduces ; it has the effect of harmonising things, and owing to the optical delusions prevailing on the stage, Mdlle. Mars remained for nearly fifty years the model young girl and young woman behind the footlights. Her greatest successes were scored in young girls' parts. She continued to play Agnès (in Molière's 'École des Femmes') when she was over forty. Scribe thought he was doing her 'a wonderful turn' by writing for her the part of a young girl who having entered the convent at sixteen, and being compelled to leave it at forty,

during the Reign of Terror, had to face the world with all the innocent, candid, unsophisticated inexperienced ways of the 'bread and butter miss' thick upon her, with the soul of a child, and the body of a matured woman. The conception was very ingenuous, the part absolutely charming.

'I'll have none of it,' exclaimed Mdlle. Mars, 'I'll have none of it. I should be downright horrid in it. Your two score years would affect my face, my movements, my diction. Pray, do not make a mistake, I am not refusing the part from womanly vanity, but from sheer artistic conscientiousness. I can only be myself on the stage when I feel that I am young, when I am supposed to be young, when I know myself to be young.'

She refused for the same reason and more categorically still, another three-act piece by Scribe, entitled 'La Grand'mère,' in which in spite of her white hairs, she won a young fellow away from a young woman in order to restore his affections to her grand-daughter. 'Don't talk to me of your sexagenarian lady. To begin with, if I succeeded in winning the heart of that young fellow, I would not give it up to any one. Furthermore, take it for granted that in the guise of a grandmother, I should look like a great-grandmother.' She was right. She was no more fit to play the part of a grandmother than a tenor is fit to sing a bass part.

Unfortunately, the poor woman was not content to

enact the young woman merely on the stage. How often have I seen her come to the rehearsals of 'Louise de Lignerolles,' nervous, irritable, her eyes red with weeping. What was the reason? That she probably just had had a violent altercation or explanation with one of the most elegant young fellows in Parisian society who held her bound to him by the ties of a mutual affection . . . but which, alas, was not shared to an equal degree. Well, nothing could make her give him up, neither his frequent faithlessness nor the humiliations to which she was often exposed by her frantic passion. It was she who was told by a physician to whom she had taken him and who noticed her agony, to set her mind at rest 'because there was nothing serious the matter *with her son*.' There is no occasion to laugh or to throw stones at her, for all we know the talent and the heart in her case may have been set ablaze by the self-same spark. Who knows whether the one would have preserved its youthful elasticity and spirit without the prolonged youth of the other? We ought not to judge those strange beings we call great artists by the common standard. They are of different ages at the same time; they are adults when they have scarcely emerged from childhood; they are mere children when 'they have reached the borderland of old age.' In that very drama of 'Louise de Lignerolles' where she enacted the mother of a little girl of eight she was constantly chiding the child for

remaining by her side when there was no necessity. 'What are you doing here, hanging on to my skirts. That's not like a little girl of your age. When you have given me my "reply," you should be romping and playing at skipping rope or at battledore and shuttlecock.' She virtually taught the child how to enact the child.

Mdlle. Mars' acting was marked by three eminent qualities. To begin with, she had that rarest of all gifts, the talent of 'composing' a part. There is nothing so difficult both to the actor and author as to create a character that shall hold together, that is, whose moods, however varying, shall accord so well as a whole as to breed the conviction in the minds of the public that they are looking at and listening to a real living being. Mdlle. Mars excelled in that profound art of extracting the harmonious whole of a part from its very contrasting elements themselves.

Her second gift was a marvellous surety of execution. I had a striking proof of it one day. We had to rehearse the most dramatic act of the piece. When she arrived, she looked tired, unnerved, there was not 'a bright note in her voice.' Well, she rehearsed every line in that subdued voice without missing a word, without missing an effect, merely whispering what under different circumstances she would have said aloud, and making up for the deficiency in sound by emphasis, and for the shortcomings of the vocal organ by articulation. I was simply amazed. I



seemed to be looking at one of those drawings of Raphael or Leonardo da Vinci in which, without the aid of brush, colour or effects of light and shade, the master has rendered the expression, the form, and intention with a mere pencil point.

Finally, her third gift was one which is scarcely considered worth having nowadays, namely, the gift of taste. Taste, I think, may be defined as being synonymous with the control of one's own strength, with the careful avoidance of exaggeration in the portrayal of passion, with restraint even in the matter of gracefulness. Some very great artists have been utterly devoid of taste. Shakespeare knows nothing about taste ; Rubens has no taste, and let us thank heaven for it, because taste pares, attenuates, and tones down things, and the very extravagance of these powerful geniuses constitutes part of their grandeur, albeit that the taste displayed by Sophocles, Virgil, Mozart, Raphael, Racine, and La Fontaine likewise constitutes one of the elements of genius. Mdlle. Mars' taste showed itself in the delightful sympathy between her voice, physiognomy and gestures. Truly, we should remember that her tutrix had been Mdlle. Contat, the queen of the domain of elegance.

In the beginning of her career, Mdlle. Mars used her left arm too freely, which habit aroused the indignation of Mdlle. Contat. 'The left arm is at best but an awkward instrument,' she said, 'and it should only be used under exceptional circumstances. But you'll

find that I'll break yours in. You'll be playing 'Le Dissipateur' to-morrow, and in the scene of the fourth act, with which I have no fault to find, that wretched arm of yours saws the air like the sail of a windmill. I am going to tie a black string to your 'paw,' and post myself at the wing where you play your scene. The moment you attempt to move your arm, I'll pull.'

The scene commences, and at the second line Mdlle. Mars' arm goes up, or rather tries to do so, for there is a pull at the string and the attempt at revolt is nipped in the bud. The scene becomes animated, the young actress catches the spirit of it, and at a singularly pathetic line the poor arm gets fidgety, and attempts to free itself a second time, but with the same result. The scene becomes still more touching and goes on increasing in pathos, the poor arm wants to emphasise the pathos, but is pulled back for the third time. It naturally protests against its bondage, the string protests on its side, until at last Mdlle. Mars carried away by her growing excitement, lifts both hands so impetuously that the string snaps in twain and the arm is free to do as it likes, and improves the occasion. When the scene is over, Mdlle. Mars makes her exit with a contrite mien and not daring to look Mdlle. Contat in the face. But the latter goes up to her, and taking hold of her hand says, 'Bravo! this is a better lesson than any I could give you. Henceforth, remember that the left arm should not be

lifted unless you can break the string by the force of your natural emotion.'

To-day, when the youngest and prettiest actresses seek their success by means of vulgar gestures, bodily contortions and trivial intonation, Mdlle. Contat would scarcely find pupils. Formerly an actress, in order to please, was bound to have taste, to-day she must have 'spice.' How could it be otherwise, when young women in society, and in the best society, set the example. Fifteen years ago, (this was written in 1886-87) Sardou made one of his young girls talk a few phrases of slang. There was a general cry of indignation. To-day the adjectives 'stunning,' 'side-splitting,' (*épatant, tordant*), constitute part and parcel of the usual vocabulary of young girls. I may frankly confess that I cannot reconcile myself to this. When I hear them utter these words, they sound to me like oaths. Mdlle. Mars would probably have considered them blasphemy.

Mdlle. Mars had another sterling and rare quality, which I, above all men, ought not to forget. She was an excellent counsellor. In the third act of our drama Louise interrupted her husband's meeting with his mistress. We had represented the husband as being embarrassed, grieved, and more or less repentant.

'This is simply absurd,' exclaimed Mdlle. Mars; 'he ought to get into a rage. He has done wrong, consequently he ought to accuse, to ill-treat me, at any rate in speech—for that's your character, gentle-

men. Your vanity rules everything. A husband who is caught by his wife at a clandestine meeting is virtually in a ridiculous position, hence my husband must get in a towering passion. You need not mind me in the case, I'll come out all the stronger, and the scene of reconciliation will be all the more touching.'

When in due course that scene came, Louise left alone with her husband, expressed her confidence in him for the future, saying, 'I have no longer any fear, I am ignorant of everything; I feel as if we had only been married yesterday.' When she got to these words she stopped short and in her somewhat brusque voice, her everyday voice, said, 'I'll not speak this line.' 'Why not, madame?' 'Why not? Because it is utterly useless in that situation.' 'Useless, useless,' I repeated, rather nettled (I was only thirty and not very patient,) I think it very good.' 'You think it very good, "I feel as if we had only been married yesterday."' 'Yes, madame, it expresses as it were the confidence which makes Louise go back to her first days of married happiness.' 'Have as much married happiness as you like, but I refuse to say "as if we had only been married yesterday." Put something else instead.' 'What am I to put?' 'Put tra la, la, la, la,—tra, la, la, la, la,—tra, la, la, la, la!' 'Great heavens,' I thought, 'she's gone out of her mind.' Thereupon I went away.

While striding along and my anger gradually subsiding, I began to reflect. 'What in the name of all

that's good did she mean? Did those tra, la, la's divided into equal parts represent to her, may be, the rhythm, the harmony she stands in need of in these words in order to convey the joy and tenderness with which her soul is overflowing? I had better think it over.' Thus said I to myself and next morning I came to the rehearsal with the following phrase in four parts. 'Everything is forgotten; I know nothing; our life only commences; it's the first time you have told me, I love you.'\*

The moment she heard the words, she exclaimed, 'That's it, that's all I wanted.'

Actors often ask you in that way for things that are not very clear, and which nevertheless are none the less just. The reasons they advance are bad, but they are right for all that. Their critical instinct resembles a kind of semi-obscurd second sight, which often gropes about, often proceeds in a zig-zag fashion, but which points out the straight road to the author.

We rehearsed the piece sixty-eight times, and during that very long period of preparation, I learned many things, notably patience. Mdlle. Mars was not always easy 'to get along' with. Very satirical and gifted with a rare talent for mimicking people, she excelled in caricaturing the gestures and the voice of everyone who came in contact with her, and on one

\* I need scarcely remind the reader that there was no possibility of rendering all this in English prose.—T.R.



occasion she gave such a capital imitation of my jerky and nervous diction of those days that she managed to cure me of it for ever. The moment I feel inclined to relapse into my old habit, I think of Mdlle. Mars and it has the desired effect. I may add that I have never met with anyone so zealous and conscientious, watching, as it were over every part, always listening to what was going on on the stage, whether she happened to be 'on' at the moment or not. One morning we were standing chatting at the wings, she was telling me of her grievances against her director. She was furious, her face, her gestures, her voice, everything was ablaze. All at once her face changes, she is angry as ever in speech, but her look, her expression becomes milder, her invectives are uttered with a smile, so that at the last sentence though the language is still that of a fury, the face is that of an angel. What had occurred? This much: while speaking she had carefully listened to the actors on the stage and become aware that her 'entrance' was nigh, and as she was to 'enter' smiling and amiable, she had prepared for it amidst her anger and whilst talking, she had changed her features as she changed her dresses when changing her parts.

On the first night of 'Louise de Lignerolles,' before the rise of the curtain, I noticed that she was rather more agitated than is generally the case with great artists on the evening of a battle; for on such occasions they feel themselves in their element, like a

great captain amidst the roar of cannon. The moment she caught sight of me, she came up to me, saying, 'To-morrow you'll discover the credit I deserved for acting as I shall act to-night, for I'll act very well.' Next morning, in fact, I learned that on coming back to her house at five in the afternoon on the day of the first performance, she found everything in the greatest disorder. The servants had just discovered that her diamonds worth sixty thousand francs, had been stolen.

In spite of this, the performance from beginning to end was a veritable triumph for her ; the success of the piece itself was very considerable. At the twentieth performance, the 23rd August, the receipts rose to five thousand six hundred francs, an enormous figure in those days. Mdlle. Mars went for her holidays,\* and was to make her re-appearance on the 1st October. She did not come back at the stated period, and only returned six months later ; she only resumed her character of Louise de Lignerolles eighteen months after, and then only enacted it twice or thrice. What was the reason? It may be explained in one word. Mdlle. Rachel had made her first appearance on the boards of the Comédie-Française in September. The brilliancy of this new star in the theatrical firmament had frightened her. She hid herself from fear of being eclipsed. She refused

\* They are often employed by great artists in France in starring the provinces.—TR.

to reappear except in an entirely new part, in order to oppose one triumph to another.

The new part was that of Mdlle. de Belle-Isle (Alexandre Dumas' play of the same name). Since then every young and charming actress of the Comédie-Française has 'attempted the part,' not one has ever succeeded in effacing the recollection of Mdlle. Mars or of proving herself her equal, and yet Mdlle. Mars was sixty-four years of age when she played it.

Here is a rather curious fact, proving once more the importance she attached to that great question of her age. One day, a friend of mine, an ardent and old admirer of everything connected with the stage, entreated me to introduce him to Mdlle. Mars. This friend suffered from a peculiar defect; he had an infallible memory. Everything in his mind was reduced to dates. If the recollection of his first love-appointment happened to well into his heart, he immediately added with a melancholy sigh, 'It was on the 13th September 1798.' While we were knocking at Mdlle. Mars' door I felt vaguely apprehensive of what might happen in consequence. 'By-the-bye,' I said, 'don't let us have any of your awkward recollections.' 'Don't worry yourself,' he replied, 'I'll be careful.' The door is opened and in another moment or so I present him to Mdlle. Mars as one of her most fervent admirers, to which introduction he adds immediately, 'Yes, madame, it is exactly forty

years ago that I had the pleasure of applauding you for the first time.' In vain do I pinch his arm, he does not understand, and at the termination of the visit he asks the illustrious actress to be allowed to call again. The request is granted in the most charming manner. A few days later, however, my friend tells me very naïvely that he has called three times without seeing her. 'Each time on my name being taken in, I got the answer : 'Madame is not at home.'

She retired in 1841 and died in 1847. I have two 'recollections' of her at that period, one of which is sadly characteristic, the other very touching.

One morning my wife was strolling in the Tuileries Gardens with her little daughter, who was then about seven, when all at once she nudged the child with her elbow, saying, 'Look.' Coming towards them was an old lady, wearing a 'false front' of black hair, stooping considerably, painfully dragging herself along and leading a small, yellow dog by a leash. The little animal evidently gave its mistress a good deal of trouble, but she bore patiently with it, stopping when it stopped, etc., etc. It was Mdlle. Mars, taking her companion for an airing, the Araminte of yore waiting upon a little mongrel.

One of Mdlle. Mars' friends was an old operatic artist whom amateurs still remember, Mme. Dabadie, the original Jemmy of Rossini's 'Guillaume Tell.' Madame Dabadie was very anxious about Mdlle. Mars' spiritual condition. 'I'll think about it, I'll

think about it ; but I must first of all see to that lawsuit of mine pending at Versailles. When I shall have won that, you may bring me a confessor,' 'I have got an admirable one,' replied the operatic artist, 'the Abbé Gaillard, the curate of the Madeleine.' 'Very well, I'll write to you when I want him.'

A week later Mdlle. Mars is suddenly and dangerously taken ill. 'Send me your curate at once,' she writes to Mme. Dabadie. The good priest went, it was he who gave me the particulars of the last days of her who was once Mdlle. Mars, and he never alluded to her grace, charm and fascination without being thoroughly moved. That part of the penitent woman was Mdlle. Mars' final one, and she enacted it as she had enacted all the others, to perfection. The priest in speaking of her triumphant success of former days, said to her : 'Where are all those beautiful wreaths, mademoiselle.?' 'Truly nowhere, monsieur l'abbé,' came the smiling answer, 'but you are preparing a much more lovely one for me, which will last for ever.'

On the last days, with her mind wandering now and then and in the intervals of prayer, she suddenly interrupted herself and after a moment's pause, began to talk of 'Dorante,' of 'love' and so forth. It was a passage from 'Les Fausses Confidences.' Then she stopped again as if listening to what she had said, and *applauded*. A touching and delightful picture, if



ever there was one. This mingling of the parts of the actress and spectator, that voice listening to its own music, those hands applauding her own words, those alternate lines of the sacred text and of comedy couplets, assuredly, all this has a grace vying with that of her most delightful parts. Who had the last words! David with his psalms or Marivaux with his sprightly epigrams. I am inclined to think it was Marivaux. That which precedes the artist closest in death is art.

## CHAPTER IV

Eugène Scribe.—The beginning of my friendship with him.—A Letter to him and his answer.—Scribe's Birth and Parentage.—His School-days and College Chums.—His beginnings as a Dramatist.—A strange Collaborateur.—A scene from 'She Stoops to Conquer' in real life.—How Scribe became the owner of Séricourt.—My success with 'Louise de Lignerolles.'—A Piece on an Episode in the Life of General Lamarque.—A qualified success.—The balls of the Duc de Nemours.—Court Dress in the forties.—Scribe wants to write a modern play for Rachel.—I find the subject.—Scribe at work.—An Essay on Scribe as a Dramatist.—Scribe as a Librettist.—A predicament of Dr Véron.—Scribe converts a dull tragedy into a sparkling comedy.—Scribe's Stage Tricks.—His Dénouements.—His reconstruction of two of Molière's dénouements.—Scribe as a Stage-Manager.—Scribe and Louis-Philippe.—Scribe as a Friend and as a Man.—Scribe and his Love-Affairs.—'How happy could I be with either,' etc.—A Last Love.—His Death.

### I

MY friendship with Scribe, like that with Casimir Delavigne, began with the letter of a schoolboy to an illustrious playwright. I was at the top of the fifth \* form and had my mind full of theatrical ideas. One day I fancied I had hit upon a subject for a comedy which seemed to me absolutely delightful. The end of the world was supposed to have been foretold, and the date mentioned in the prediction was accepted

\* Fifth form according to English scholastic rules.—TR.

as a certainty. Of course the acceptance of the fiat produced a complete transformation in people's actions, language, positions, and sentiments. That sword of Damocles suspended over the whole of humanity caused the hitherto stifled, repressed and forcibly subdued passions to burst forth from the inmost recesses of men's hearts like so many volcanos. Like that clarion sound before Jericho, it was to over-topple all social castes and distinctions. There was an end to poverty and riches. There were neither great nor small. The impending end necessarily brought people face to face as equals and unshackled, figuratively as well as literally. In short, if, as I intended, the first act was to treat of society in its old aspect, unimpaired, law-abiding, peaceful and using the powers conferred upon it in the usual way, the announcement of that sentence of death would, one may well imagine, produce a tremendous sensation from a theatrical point of view. Enraptured with my plan, I wrote to Scribe, asking him to carry it out with me; the plan to be a free gift. I signed with three asterisks and added with the comical conceit of the youngster who is bent upon being modest: 'I will be a discreet donor.' I was delighted with the 'discreet donor.' I felt proud of it, the student in rhetoric flattered himself upon having hit the grandiloquent expression. Since then I have laughed more than once at the recollection of it.

Scribe replied to M. \* \* \* in a letter, full of kindli-

ness, heightened by a touch of sprightly irony. He instinctively guessed that he was dealing with some 'young hopeful.'

'Monsieur,' he wrote, 'your subject is novel and interesting; unfortunately in order to command the slightest chance of success, there is one indispensable condition, namely, that the public itself on the first night should feel more or less convinced that the end of the world is drawing nigh. That is the obstacle. At the present moment the public is far from believing this, and it will be difficult to force that belief upon them. Fortunately, people are talking of a comet which is to appear next year, a comet which is expected to shatter our globe like a simple wine-glass. Let us wait for the comet. Its coming may put the public in the humour to be terrified. If so, I will take advantage of it and write the piece, or rather we will take advantage of it, for I sincerely trust that that great event which will overtopple so many things will also rend the veil behind which my anonymous correspondent hides himself.'

This letter, kindly withal, notwithstanding its tone of banter, filled me with delight. I kept the precious note like some treasure, still, I did not make myself known. I kept waiting for the comet and waited in vain, it frightened no one and left me with regard to M. Scribe in the position of M. \* \* \*

I little expected then that twenty years later I should

become his collaborateur and friend, that I should be present at his most signal triumphs and have my share in some of these, and that finally, after a lapse of sixty years, I should take up the pen to save him from supercilious indifference and oblivion. I do not intend to write his 'apology,' I will neither recriminate nor praise him inordinately, I will not attempt to hide the weak points of his talent. I will confine myself to painting him such as I knew him for many years, at work, in his study, chatting, writing, initiating me in his method of working, and working with me and will leave aside his works, trusting to posterity to assign to them their proper place.

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The theory of environment is very much the fashion just now. It appears to me to contain a good deal of truth. The spot in which we happen to be born, the circumstances amid which we grow up exercise a powerful influence on our lives. Scribe is a striking instance of this.

He came into the world on the 11th June 1791, in the Rue Saint-Denis, in a silk warehouse, kept by his mother, at the sign of the 'Black Cat,' a stone's throw away from the (then) central market; consequently in the midst of a business quarter, inhabited by a frugal, hard working middle-class, far removed from the aristocracy and almost in contact with the people,



not to say the 'populace.' His talent bears the stamp of his origin.

A second point worthy of notice is the fact of his guardian having been a celebrated barrister to whom he went every Sunday. To this connection he probably owed his understanding of business matters with which he has often been reproached, and which, after all, frequently proved an advantage in his pieces. There is a third important circumstance which we should not overlook; he was educated at Sainte-Barbe. Thence sprang, no doubt, his tendency for keeping up college friendships, the traces of which are met with at every instant in his plays. There are at least a score of Scribe's pieces, the action of which begins with the accidental or prearranged meeting of two college chums who, on finding themselves together again after many years, feel a revival of all the hopes and affections of their youthful days, and their mutual confessions and recollections supply a kind of affectionate note to the sprightliness of the 'exposition.' Truly, his sojourn at Sainte-Barbe had given him 'cronies' eminently fit to stir within his heart the love for 'Companions of yore.' Two of these were Germain and Casimir Delavigne. All three were called 'the inseparables.' Casimir and Germain went to their parents on the days they had leave, and Germain, through his connection with the manager of a small theatre, had tickets for the play. He went to it every Sunday, and went, as it were, for the whole three.

On the Monday, at 'play time,' there were endless discussions between him, his brother, and Scribe on the piece itself, on the acting of it, on the effect both had produced on the public, the whole interspersed, as a matter of course, with numberless projects for comedies or farces and aspirations to see their joint names on the playbills. Their beginnings were not brilliant. 'Do you know,' said Scribe one day to Janin and Rolle when all three were dining with me; 'Do you know how I did begin? I began with fourteen failures. Yes, with fourteen. But it served me right. My dear friends, you have no idea how flat and heavy those pieces were. Nevertheless,' he added with charming modesty, 'there is one I would fain rescue from the ignominy inflicted on it. It was hissed more than it deserved, for it was not as bad as any of the others. Really and truly, the verdict was unjust.' We could not help laughing. 'Yes, you are laughing, and I too am laughing, but it was no laughing matter to me in those days. After each failure, Germain and I strode the whole length of the Boulevards, desperate, furious, I repeating at every moment: "What a beastly trade, but it's all over. I give it up. *After the four or five plots* we have in our desks, I'll write no more."' *After the four or five plots*, what a pretty touch of nature; it is the rallying cry of every human passion under the sun. 'I'll have four or five throws more,' says the gambler, 'after that I'll play no more.' 'One last farewell,' says the

love-sick wight, 'and then I'll leave her for ever.' And the gambler keeps on gambling, and the love-sick wight does not leave the damsel ; and seeing that the dramatist is both a love-sick wight and a gambler, he tries over and over again.

That was what Scribe did, and he acted wisely. But Scribe or no Scribe, a playwright at the outset of his career is bound to stumble and to make mistakes. He is ignorant of his own particular tendencies and he wants someone to point them out to him. In Scribe's case that 'someone' was one of the oddest characters I have known. Though he nominally figures on the list of French dramatic authors, he had scarcely any talent, he had not even what we call sparkle or wit. But the piercing eyes that flashed from behind his glasses, the bushy, mobile eyebrows, the sarcastic mouth, the long and inquisitive looking nose, all these stamped him as an observer, an inquirer, a kind of sleuthhound. One day when discussing the editor of a periodical whose enemies averred that his face was like that of a pig, Béranger wittily remarked, 'A pig if you like, but he has the knack of finding truffles.' Well, Scribe's friend dug him out from beneath all his failures, and he conceived the strangest device to bring out what really 'in him was.' He constantly repeated to him : 'You will be all right. The day will come when you will show as much talent as Barré, Radet and Desfontaines.' 'How absurd of you to exaggerate as you

do,' replied Scribe. 'I am not exaggerating at all, only you want two things, perseverance in your work and solitude. I am going to take you away. I have got some friends a few miles distant from Paris. They have a very nice house in the country, that's where I am going to take you.' 'You are going to take me, you are going to take me; what's the good of telling me you are going to take me? Your friends do not know me, I do not know them.' 'I know them, and that's enough. We'll take up our quarters for four months with them, and in the autumn you'll come back to Paris with five or six charming pieces.' In another week our friends were comfortably settled in two rooms adjoining one another, Scribe under the careful surveillance of his gaoler who only allowed him to go down to his hosts after he had finished his day's work, when he was sure to find excellent fare and a cordial welcome. There was one thing, however, which made Scribe feel uncomfortable, namely, his friend's occasional rudeness to his host. When the meat happened to be done too much, or the vegetables too salt, he simply exclaimed: 'This is horrible stuff, take it away, take it away.' Scribe, like most nice-minded people when compelled to sit by while their friends are making fools of themselves, felt awkward and fidgetty, they feel as if they and not their friends were the offenders. Scribe bent his head over his plate, kicked his friend under the table to make him hold his tongue, and when the dinner

was over, remonstrated with him in the liveliest terms. 'That's not the way to speak to one's hosts,' he said. 'Don't trouble yourself about that, they like it,' was the answer. 'They like it ! why you are behaving as if you were at an inn.'

The fact was that they were at an inn, or at any rate in a boarding-house, a boarding-house where the friend paid for Scribe whom he housed, fed and provided for in a general way, in order to compel him to work, in order to force his genius to sprout forth. It would be difficult to find a more curious instance of admiration for talent. Only, for the sake of thorough accuracy, I ought to add that the friend was not wholly prompted by pure love of art. For, if he had as much as suggested the title of the piece, indicated its starting point or inspired a song, he assumed the part of collaborateur, claimed the acknowledgment, shared the author's fees and the glory accruing from the work. He undoubtedly worshipped Scribe, but Scribe paid the budget of that worship.

These curious details were told to me by Scribe at Séricourt while we were working at 'Adrienne Lecouvreur,' 'and,' added he laughing, 'there is this or that piece of mine to which the fellow put his name without having written a syllable of it. It was his due after all, for I'll never be able to repay him. He had the most wonderful knack of inciting me to work, of winding me up to the required pitch, of comforting me under disappointment. I am even



indebted to him for Séricourt. Yes, my dear fellow, the very room in which we are seated now, do you know what it is made out of? Out of the two small rooms in which I wrote by his side, and thanks to him, my first works.'

'Do you mean to say,' I asked, 'that the boarding-house . . . .'

'Séricourt is the former boarding-house. I became its owner by the strangest coincidence. I had just returned from Belgium with Mélesville; we were posting. When we got to La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, we had to change horses. The postboys were evidently in no hurry, and while waiting I sat down on a milestone or something of the kind, and took out my pocket-book to jot down a scene which had struck me as we were driving along. Oh, I never wasted my time. While I was considering for a moment or so, I happened to look up and noticed a bill, setting forth the conditions and particulars of the sale of Séricourt *à l'amiable*.\* "Séricourt," I say to myself all of a sudden, "surely I know that name. Monsieur," this to the innkeeper standing in his doorway, "does not Séricourt belong to two ladies of the name of D——?" "It does, monsieur." "Do you think one would be allowed to go over the property?"

\* The bills of a sale in France always state whether the sale is a voluntary or compulsory one. In the one case the sale may be effected by private contract before the auction; in the other, the property must go to the hammer, even if all the parties interested would consent to the less expensive and less formal method.—TR.

"I feel sure, for it is for sale." "How long would it take to get there?" "About three-quarters of an hour." "Upon my word, I should like to have a look at my old room," I exclaimed aloud, just as the post-boys and horses came jingling along. "Mélesville, do you mind getting to Paris a couple of hours later?" I say, turning to my companion. "Not in the least," is the answer. "Very well then, postillion, drive us to Séricourt." An hour later I was looking at the garden, through the house, the whole of my youthful attempts uprose before me; I felt moved beyond description, and next morning I had bought the small estate where the recollection of my early thirties helps me in cheerfully bearing my sixties.'

In what way did I become Scribe's collaborateur? In what way did we write 'Adrienne Lecouvreur?' A short but necessary digression compels me to speak of myself, but it is only a roundabout way back to him.

## II

The success of 'Louise de Lignerolles' in 1838 had greatly encouraged me, and in 1844 I read to the Committee of the Comédie-Française, a five-act drama in verse, entitled, 'Guerrero ou la Trahison.' It was accepted without a dissentient voice. After I had read the third act, the members of the Committee, contrary to all precedent, got up and catching hold of my hands congratulated me; Provost offered to play one of the principal parts. The main idea of the

work explained its success, for I may safely say that it was rather strong and absolutely new. A fact of which I had been an eye-witness and a celebrated personage whose friend I had been had inspired that idea. In 1829 I had spent my holidays at Saint-Sever, in the department of the Landes with a man who had had his share of the world's popularity and glory : namely, General Lamarque. His name under the Empire was inseparably connected with a daring exploit, the bold and heroic capture of Capri.

The general was a native of Saint-Sever and resided there in 1829. Rich, enjoying great consideration, a scholar and a clever scholar to boot, he was simply wearing himself out with ennui and rage. The Bourbons had exiled him in 1815, and though the sentence was revoked three years later, he was deprived of all chances of active service, struck off the army list, etc., etc. He came to settle in the small town where he was born. The idea of his shattered career filled him with despair, nothing could compensate or comfort him for that. To beguile his grief he bethought himself of building a veritable palace. A twelvemonth was spent in the building of it, and when it was finished, he flung himself headlong into a translation of 'Ossian' in verse which took him another twelvemonth. When he had written the last lines, he took to cultivating flowers, and from Paris, where he spent a few months every winter, he brought collections of geraniums, rose bushes, peonies ; but

neither building nor bedding, neither rhyming, nor constructing palaces prevented the craving of his heart, all these amusements only soured him by their inaneity, and he relapsed into his former slough of despair, a despondency still more embittered by the cruel sentiment of his inactivity. His passion for soldiering was so intense that when out riding with his nephew and myself in the neighbourhood of Saint-Sever, he stopped more than once, saying all of a sudden: 'Look here, young men, do you see that height yonder? Well, suppose it were bristling with cannon and occupied by Prussians, how would you manage to take it?' Saying which, he would put spurs to his horse, shouting for us to follow him, and breasting the hill, initiate us in the mysteries of attacking an outwork. To cut my story short. When in 1823 the war with Spain broke out, he could no longer restrain himself. The sound of cannon suddenly bursting forth in Europe made him lose his head, and he, the victor of Capri, the exile of 1815 wrote to the Minister for War offering his sword, and winding up his petition with: 'My greatest ambition is to die on the battlefield wrapt in the folds of the white flag.' What proved to be the bitterest of all trials was that the Minister proved more tenacious of his reputation than he himself; he would not sanction his proposed faithlessness and the offer was declined. We should not be too hard on him. The passion for war is as powerful as that of love and for gambling.

Have we not seen a striking instance of it during the Austro-Italian campaign. General Changarnier, living in exile at Antwerp was said to spend his days by following on the map the march of our troops at Magenta and Solferino, and when in 1870 war broke out, he also could hold out no longer. He not only forgot the harm the Emperor had done him, but the evil he himself had said of the Emperor, and wrote to him of whom he had spoken with so much contempt and raillery, entreating him in almost the same terms of Philoctetes in Sophocles to employ him, no matter where, no matter how, without a grade, without pay, without a fixed post; he only wished to hear the roar of the cannon once more. It was that passion with all its attendant despair, with all its frenzied rage, and finally leading to disloyalty which I had endeavoured to transfer to the stage, merely changing defection into treason.

The rehearsals commenced almost as soon as the piece had been accepted, and confirmed the favourable predictions it had called forth at the reading. On the eve of its performance Mdlle. Anaïs, an actress of the Comédie-Française who was not in the cast, said to me: 'It appears they are going to erect a statue to you to-morrow.' Unfortunately the performance itself did not altogether realise that happy augury.

The first part met with a genuine, nay even striking success, but the latter part was received with benevo-



lent indifference. When leaving the house, I ran against Mdle. Mars who said : 'Too severe in its tone, my friend, too severe.' The piece added a good deal to my reputation, but not to my exchequer. Nevertheless I was indebted to it for one precious favour, the friendship of Scribe who had been kind enough to attend the rehearsals and who remained a warm partisan of the play ; furthermore, for two distinctions, the Cross of the Legion of Honour and a subsequent invitation to a ball. At that particular period the Duc de Nemours gave some very brilliant balls at the Pavillon de Marsan, the invitations to which were greatly prized. Court dress, the coat à la Française, white kerseymere knee breeches, white silk stockings, sword, etc., was strictly enforced. I had been told that the prince had been very much struck with my drama, and that he would willingly send me an invitation, provided he felt sure that it would be accepted. I did accept, and on my name being announced by the attendant, the Duc advanced a few steps towards me, which distinction made me feel somewhat awkward, seeing that I had never spoken to a prince of royal blood.

My embarrassment, however, soon vanished when I saw his. Timidity if it be accompanied by kindness and courtesy in persons of high rank, is not far short of the quality of grace ; the timidity of the Duc was of that kind. He was not a fluent talker, but his looks and gestures conveyed so amiably

what his tongue failed to utter, that after a few moments we were chatting together like two young fellows of the same age. My legs were the most awkward part of me. In 1845 shapely calves were not the rule in society. Those confounded white silk stockings fidgetted me a good deal, I felt as if I were décolleté below. Moreover, people's vanity came into play, everyone was looking at everyone else's legs. The fear of looking ridiculous made people more sensitive than usual. Fortunately the young princes came to the rescue. All four were graceful and elegant to a degree, but their tibias dwindled down to such thin and feeble 'broomsticks' that it looked as if they had ordered them expressly to make us feel at home. It was impossible to feel ashamed of one's legs after having looked at theirs. No legs ever exercised the virtue of hospitality with such kindly forethought. Towards eleven o'clock the king made his appearance. He was the only one who wore trousers. He stood watching the groups of dancers with a kind of benevolent cynicism, his hat reposing on his abdomen as on a tiny shelf, and with such a merry, mischievous twinkle in his eye that I instinctively guessed what M. Thiers told me since. 'The king,' he said one day to me, 'was the most brilliant story-teller and the greatest master of banter in the whole of his kingdom.'

'Guerrero,' had been the beginning of my intimacy with Scribe. I often went to see him in the morn-

ing. One day I found him in a great state of excitement. 'You are the very man I want,' he said, 'you are going to give me a bit of advice. I have had an offer which both tempts and frightens me. The director of the Comédie-Française wants me to write a part for Mdlle. Rachel.' 'Well, who is to prevent you?' 'Corneille and Racine. How can I possibly put my humble prose in that mouth accustomed to recite the verse of "Andromaque" and "Horace?"' 'What's that to you?' 'You would not be frightened?' 'Not in the least.' 'You would dare to write a prose part for the representative of Phèdre and Camille?' 'Certainly, well, find a subject and we'll write the piece together.'

Three days after that I enter Scribe's room with the classical 'Eurêka' on my lips. I tell him my idea. 'Your idea is not a good one, it is devoid of interest,' 'Devoid of interest,' I exclaim, and forthwith begin to defend my idea. 'Let us try,' he says, 'if your idea has got anything in it, *we'll find it out in half-an-hour or so*. And he immediately begins to turn my idea upside down and inside out, to pull it to pieces, and to examine every shred of it. 'Not a thing in it, as I told you; you must find something else,' he winds up. On that occasion I had the first practical demonstration of Scribe's marvellous facility of finding out at a glance whether an idea was dramatic or not. A few days later I call again, this time with the subject of 'Adrienne Lecouvreur.' The words

have scarcely passed my lips when he jumps from his chair, rushes towards me, flings his arms round my neck, shouting at the top of his voice, 'A hundred nights, with six thousand francs receipts each night.' 'Do you think so?' I say. 'I don't think it. I feel certain. It is an admirable "find." You have hit upon the only means of making Rachel talk prose. Come to-morrow morning, and we'll set to work immediately.'

At ten o'clock next morning I was with him. He was being operated upon by his barber, who held him by the nose. The moment he caught sight of me, he said quickly, in that peculiar tone of voice of a man who is being shaved, 'My dear boy, I have found what we want.' 'Take care, Monsieur Scribe, you'll make me cut you,' interposed the barber. 'All right, but be quick.' And while the razor was gliding over his face, his fingers were twitching excitedly, he kept looking and smiling at me. No sooner is the man's back turned than there comes an avalanche of ideas, of more or less defined situations, of outlined characters which had sprung up in his mind during the last four-and-twenty hours, and which were being sketched rapidly by him while he was dipping his face into the water, while he was brushing his hair and putting on his shirt, while he was changing his trousers and tying his cravat, while he was getting into his waistcoat and coat and fastening his watch chain, for he liked to sit down to his work dressed and ready to go out

at a moment's notice. As a matter of course, I told him the result of my meditations, and then he seated himself on a small chair at his writing-table, saying, 'And now to work, to work.'

There is no need to enter into particulars of that collaboration, I will only point out two or three facts calculated to show Scribe as a man, an author, and a collaborateur.

In our theatrical slang there exists a very significant word; it is the word '*numérotage*.' The numbering is the planning of the sequential order of the scenes. That sequential ordering is not only a kind of classification, it also comprises the development, that is, the accumulating interest of the play. That numbering is the itinerary of the *dramatis personæ* with the points of interest as land marks. Each scene must not only be the logical outcome of the scene that preceded it and be connected with the one that follows it, but it is bound to impart to it its motive and movement, so as to push the piece forward without interruption and in that way to reach, stage by stage, the final aim, in other words the *dénouement*. Scribe had not only a talent for numbering, he had the positive genius of it. No sooner had the plan of a piece been sketched than the whole materials for the work came to him as if by magic, and placed themselves in their logical position. During one of our first conversations on 'Adrienne Lecouvreur,' when the situations were still in a very sketchy state, he



suddenly got up, then sat down again at his writing table. 'What are you doing?' I asked. 'Writing out the sequence of the scenes of the first act,' was the answer. 'But we have not decided as to what we are going to put in that first act.' 'Never mind, never mind. Don't interrupt the thread.' And forthwith he wrote—

SCENE I.—The Princesse de Bouillon, The Abbé.

SCENE II.—The Same, the Duchesse d'Aumont.

SCENE III.—The Same, the Prince de Bouillon.

'But my dear Scribe,' I remarked, interrupting him, 'before bringing the Prince de Bouillon on the stage, we ought at least to know . . .' 'Never mind,' was the answer, 'the Prince de Bouillon is to appear twice in that act, and if I do not "bring him on" at that particular moment, I shall not know what to do with him.' Saying which, he went on writing and a few days later when all the incidents and scenic movements of that first act were finally decided upon, the personages almost naturally took up their position at the points assigned to them, like guests at a dinner where the hostess has inscribed their names. I was simply astonished. I have rarely met with a more instructive fact.

In the midst of our work, Scribe was compelled to interrupt it. He explained the reason in a letter which I am anxious to quote because it affords not only a phase of his character, but a glimpse of his life.

‘My dear friend,’ he wrote, ‘I am writing this to ask you for a longer credit. Our dear Adrienne is one of those creatures for whom everything else should be put aside. When one is engaged with her, one should not be engaged with anyone or anything but her. Unfortunately, just at the moment when I am beginning the third act, the Opéra-Comique claims my services for the new score of Auber; Buloz (the director of the Comédie-Française) asks me for a five-act comedy, ‘Le Puff,’ which is to be put on before ‘Adrienne’ and finally Montigny (the manager of the Gymnase) is sounding a cry of alarm because ‘Charlotte Corday’ has turned out a failure. He insists upon my finishing ‘La Déesse,’ a piece in three acts, with music and songs in which Saintine is collaborating with me. I do not know whether the gods are particularly wearisome, one thing I do know, this goddess has bored me to death. I sat “down to her” in a desperate mood, working from five in the morning till late at night, and by dint of such labour managed to put together two more or less presentable acts. But after these I felt fagged and wrote to Saintine to come to the rescue for the third. He came and saw, but did not conquer, and now the whole affair has to be started afresh. Meanwhile, Adrienne whom I love with all my heart, is waiting and you are waiting also. But I will take no engagement with regard to ‘Le Puff,’ without your sanction. I wish to put matters clearly to you, but if my

reasons fail to convince you and you cannot grant me a delay until October, if the delay grieves you, write to me to that effect. That reason will have more weight with me than all mine.'

It would be difficult, I believe, to be more gracious, more kind, and let me remind the reader that when he wrote that letter, Scribe was in the zenith of his fame and I scarcely more than a beginner. Consequently I answered as follows: 'My dear friend, your letter has touched me much more deeply than the delay with regard to "Adrienne" is likely to grieve me. Your fear of giving me pain went straight to my heart. Don't trouble about me and write your comic opera, write your "Déesse," and write your "Puff." Meanwhile I will write our first two acts, which I will take to you personally when finished, to Séricourt.' I took and read them to him. During the whole of my reading the first act, he kept rubbing his head, and when it was finished, he said: 'It won't do at all. Let's hear the second act.' At the fourth page, he begins to talk to himself in a low voice . . . 'Bravo, excellent.' And he sets to laughing and crying and clapping his hands, adding, 'As for that act, I'll answer for its effect. Upon my word, I don't often get collaborateurs of your mettle. There is only one thing to which I object in that second act: Adrienne's story with which she enters.' 'You have hit the wrong thing,' I said laughing. 'That story is absolutely true. I took it almost word for word from the

"Mémoires" of Mdlle. Clairon.' 'That's just it, it hangs fire because it is true. I do not wish you to misconstrue my meaning. The truth is absolutely necessary on the stage, but it has to be focussed in accordance with the optical conditions of the stage. I am not at all surprised that the story in Mdlle. Clairon's "Mémoires" struck you, it was sure to produce a great effect in them, because it places before you an individual of flesh and blood, a fact that has happened and because the actress imparts as it were her own life to the story. You take an interest in her by being interested in what she says. But on the stage we are in the absolute domain of fiction, and fiction has its laws. We are speaking not to one reader, but to fifteen hundred individuals and the number of spectators, the size of the house itself change the moral conditions of the effect, just as the laws of optics and acoustics modify the material conditions of that effect. Instead of that true narrative, I am going to put an absolutely fictitious one, invented for Adrienne, suited to Adrienne and which will produce the most startling effect upon the public.' This was done, and on 6th October 1848 we read 'Adrienne' to the Committee of the Comédie-Française. Our piece was rejected without a dissentient vote. How it was enthusiastically underlined and put in rehearsal six months afterwards is a play within a play which I will describe when I come to talk of Mdlle. Rachel herself. At present I am in too great a hurry

to leave Adrienne in order to show the grand sides of Scribe's character and career.

A careful review of Scribe's career as a playwright must necessarily deal with every branch of dramatic art, because he himself dealt with everyone of these and in each he has left us a model or two which if they are not absolutely worthy of imitation, are, at any rate deserving of consideration.

Among the foremost gifts of the dramatist, those of invention and imagination rank the highest. We must be careful not to confound those two faculties. They are closely connected, they support one another, but each has its special character and its distinct domain. Invention creates, imagination works out the thing. To the one belongs the primary idea, the finding of the subject, to the other the execution thereof. Both are not always to be met with in the same man and rarely in equal proportions. A man may have more imagination than invention, or more invention than imagination. Our own times afford us two striking instances of this. Balzac is a mighty inventor. He invents wonderful characters, splendid 'starting points,' but his execution, for lack of imagination, is often heavy; Balzac falls short of that fertility of incidents, that liveliness of dialogue which make a powerful work amusing besides. The winged goddess did not pass that way. Look, on the other hand, at Alexandre Dumas. The starting points of his subjects belong as often as not to someone else.



Sometimes he takes them from history, at others he has them given to him by his collaborateurs, then again he simply borrows them from other works. He himself in his charming and unaffectedly good-natured *Mémoires* admits that 'Antony' was inspired to him by the first performance of 'Marion Delorme.' In order to stir his faculty of création he often wanted that tap on the cheek which a certain philosopher, whose name I forget, declared to be necessary to him in order to accelerate the pace of the world. But no sooner was that impulse given than Alexandre Dumas set the machine a-revolving and with a vengeance. No carriage drawn by the most spirited team ever went down-hill at such a rattling gallop, with greater contempt for everything in its way, with greater surety also than a drama or novel by Alexandre Dumas proceeded towards its *dénouement*. Even when the horses are not his he makes them his by the way he handles the ribbons. Nay, they may give him cab horses, he makes them step out like thoroughbreds.

With Scribe the powers of invention and imagination were of equal value and of great value. He has often been contemptuously relegated among the adaptors or arrangers of other people's ideas. In reality, no literature in the world has produced so powerful a dramatic inventor. One single fact will suffice to prove this. For a score of years he positively held sway over the four principal theatres in Paris; namely, the Opéra, the Opéra-

Comique, the Gymnase and finally the Comédie-Française. Each of these four theatres he had positively endowed with fresh life or added to its intellectual as well as material wealth by writing for it. Before him, the repertory of the Opéra was composed, with the glorious exception of 'La Vestale' of classical tragedies, merely transformed into so many libretti; Iphigenias, Alcestes, Armitas, Œdipes, or kindred subjects, but always the same which, taken up in succession by different composers, left the librettists scope for nothing save elegant versification. What did Scribe bring to it? Poems. 'Le Prophète,' 'Les Huguenots,' 'La Juive,' 'Robert le Diable,' 'Guido et Ginevra,' 'Gustave, ou le Bal Masqué,' are works the like of which were absolutely unknown before Scribe and constitute him one of our greatest lyric poets, if we take the word 'poet' in the antique sense, ποιητής, creator. One of Scribe's least favourably disposed critics has ranked 'Le Prophète' among Shakespearian conceptions. Whence sprang that conception? From the simple perusal of an illustrated edition of the Bible. He was reading the description of the marriage in Cana when he came upon the words, 'Woman what have I to do with thee?' He read no further, for his imagination had been struck and had already begun to transform the image of Christ. 'A man gradually impelled to divest himself of all his natural sentiments in order to fulfil what he regards as his mission, a man

sacrificing his duty as a son to assume the part of God ; it would be a magnificent character to sketch,' he said to himself. 'And what a splendid part it would be for Talma.' Unfortunately Talma was dead, but fortunately Meyerbeer was alive, and Scribe composed the libretto of 'Le Prophète.'

What was the Opéra-Comique before him? A charming but very mild kind of playhouse. But 'Le Domino Noir,' 'La Dame Blanche,' 'La Sirène,' 'La Neige,' 'Fra Diavolo,' 'L'Ambassadrice,' 'La Part du Diable,' opened a new road to music by endowing lyrical comedy with a new form. Scribe has contributed his share to Auber's glory, seeing that Auber would not have been the Auber he was without Scribe. 'Do you know to whom I owe the phrase of "Amour sacré de la patrie"?' said the composer of 'La Muette de Portici' (Masaniello), one day to me. 'To Scribe. One day while we were out walking he marked the rhythm of the line so vividly to me that the melody came as it were of itself. He had spoken my duo to me.' Scribe, therefore, is not only entitled to one patent as an inventor with regard to the Opéra-Comique, but to two.

Before the advent of Scribe, a vaudeville was based upon a slight story, more or less adorned with song ; Scribe raised it to the rank of comedy of character—Le Théâtre de Madame \* has become a branch of the Comédie-Française.

\* The present Gymnase.—Tr.

And finally, at the Comédie-Française itself, leaving aside the novel experiments implied in such pieces as 'La Camaraderie,' 'La Calomnie,' 'Le Verre d'Eau,' what is 'Bertrand and Raton'? Simply the most beautiful political comedy of its repertory.

Such was Scribe as an inventor. As for his imagination, it was practically inexhaustible in devising startling incidents, in overcoming apparently insuperable obstacles. I need only give one instance. 'La Révolte au Sérail,' a ballet, the name of the author of which I do not remember,\* was being actively rehearsed at the Opéra, Mdlle. Taglioni was to enact the principal part. Two days before the first performance, which was already advertised with the quasi-sacred and binding word, 'Irrevocably,' over it, the Director of the Opéra (Dr Véron) rushed into Scribe's study at nine in the morning: 'I am simply going frantic, ruin is staring me in the face, you alone can avert it,' he said. 'What is the matter?' asked Scribe. 'The performance of my ballet is impossible.' 'Why?' 'The whole of the success depends on the situation of the second act, and that situation is as follows: Mdlle. Taglioni who is shut up and besieged by the revolutionaries in the palace, enlists all the women of the harem, provides them with arms, drills

\* The author of 'La Révolte au Sérail' was Mdlle. Taglioni's father. By all accounts, it was one of the most stupid productions of that most stupid of individuals. Nevertheless, the first twenty performances yielded more money than the first twenty-five performances of 'Robert le Diable,' which is not saying little.—TR.

and converts them into soldiers, whose command she assumes. She repels the attack.' 'That's a very original idea,' replies Scribe. 'That may be,' says the director, 'but we discovered yesterday that it is perfectly absurd.' 'Why?' 'Because in the first act she has had a talisman given to her by a magician. Hence, she would only have to show that talisman and all the eunuchs would take to their heels.' 'That's true,' remarks Scribe, 'and it makes the affair very serious.' 'That's what I say, and under the circumstances my only hope lies with you.' 'Very well, I'll be with you at rehearsal to-day and try to find something afterwards.' 'That won't do at all. It's no good trying to find afterwards, I want you to find something now, at this very minute. It's of no use your coming to dress rehearsal, there will be no more dress rehearsals. Between now and to-night, this very day, you must find some means of enabling me to give the ballet without changing anything, for there is no time to change anything, and without the necessity of a day's delay, for every day of delay means ten thousand francs.' 'Very well,' replies Scribe, 'leave me to myself for an hour or so, and I'll try to think it out.'

The director departs and slowly descends the score of steps leading to the ground floor, but before he can ask the concierge to let him out, he hears a voice shouting after him: 'Véron, come back, I have found what you want.' As a matter of course, Véron



comes up much quicker than he went down. 'You have found what I want?' he gasps, panting for breath. 'Yes. What was Mdlle. Taglioni's talisman?' 'A ring.' 'Very well, we'll change it into a rose. Who was her lover?' 'A young attendant at the seraglio.' 'We'll transform him into a young shepherd. What was the *divertissement* in the first act?' 'A dance before the Sultan in the garden of the palace.' 'That's all right. After the dance we'll make Mdlle. Taglioni sit down on a grassy knoll, where she'll fall asleep; the little shepherd shall steal softly towards her and take the rose away, and when in the second she'll want to have recourse to her talisman and take it from her bosom, it will no longer be there. You see it wasn't, after all, so very difficult to get out of the difficulty.' 'I felt sure that you would be able to do it,' exclaims Dr Véron, rushing towards the stairs which he descends even quicker than he had ascended them a few minutes before. A quarter-of-an-hour later an envelope is brought to Scribe which contains two notes of 1000 francs each, accompanied by the words: 'This is not a fee, merely a grateful acknowledgment.' 'That was the only time,' said Scribe, when telling the story, 'I earned two thousand francs in two minutes.'

Here is a fact, illustrating still more forcibly that faculty for transforming things, which in his case was nothing short of marvellous. One of his friends came to consult him on a very harrowing and

sombre five-act drama, intended for the Ambigu. 'Well, my dear friend and master, what's your opinion?' says the author after the first act. 'Go on,' remarks Scribe seemingly absorbed in thought. 'Let us have the second act.' The author goes on reading, the drama getting more sombre as he proceeds, and Scribe's face lighting up as the drama gets more sombre. Somewhat surprised at that kind of success which he had certainly not foreseen, the poor author begins to stutter and stammer and to feel very confused, until Scribe, unable to hold out any longer, suddenly exclaims: 'Upon my word, it's absolutely side-splitting.' 'I'll trouble you no longer, *cher maître*, we have had enough of this,' says the author somewhat nettled. 'I perceive well enough that my piece is very bad.' 'What do you mean by bad; say it is excellent, delightful, positively delightful. It contains some wonderfully comic effects and I feel certain that Ferville will be as amusing as Arnal.' At the name of Arnal, the tragic author, indignant beyond measure, leaps from his chair. He made sure that Scribe had not heard a syllable of his play. But he was utterly mistaken. Not only had Scribe listened very attentively, but he had reconstructed the piece while he was listening, and as each lugubrious scene dragged its weary length along transformed it into a comedy-scene. When the reading was over the huge, heavy, commonplace five-act melodrama had become a delightful, sparkling comedy in one

act, which we know under the title of 'La Chanoinesse.'

### III

Next in importance to the invention of the subject stands the planning of a play. Nowadays the planning of a play is greatly scoffed at. The author who happens to plan his piece carefully is treated to all sorts of nicknames, 'bone-setter,' 'osteologist,' 'anatomist,' 'dissector,' 'skeleton-maker,' etc., etc. To all of which sobriquets I have but one reply. During the last thirty years a goodly number of old pieces have been revived ; the only successful ones are the pieces based upon a good plan. The plan is to a play what it is to a house, the first and foremost condition of its beauty and stability. You may load and overload a building with the most magnificent decoration and ornament, you may use the most solid materials, if that building be not erected in accordance with the laws of equilibrium and due proportion that building will neither please nor last. The same holds good of a dramatic story. The dramatic story must before all things be clear, and without a plan there can be no clearness. The dramatic story must proceed without stoppage to a defined goal, without a plan such progress is impossible. The dramatic story must assign to each of its characters its proper position, each fact must be placed at its exact point ; without a plan there can be no due regard to proportion. The plan does not only include the ordering of the play: it also

includes that which Alexandre Dumas, the elder, called the first article of the playwright's creed, the art of preparing situations, in other words, of logically and naturally leading up to them. The public as a collective being is a very odd creature, very exacting, and most often very illogical. It insists upon everything being led up to, upon being hinted at to them, and at the same time it wants to be startled by the quasi-unforeseen. If, to use the popular expression, a thing drops upon them from the skies, they are shocked ; if a fact is too plainly announced beforehand, they are bored ; in order to please them the playwright has to treat them both as a confidant and as a dupe : that is, to drop carelessly at some point of the play a word that shall pass almost unperceived and yet give them an inkling of what is going to happen, a word that goes in at one ear and out at the other, and which, when the 'situation' comes upon them, shall elicit an exclamation of content, that ah ! which signifies : ' True, he warned us, how stupid we were not to have guessed as much.'

After that their delight knows no bounds, and Scribe was a past-master in that particular trick of delighting them. I would recommend the perusal of one of his master-pieces, ' La Famille Riquebourg,' and would ask the reader to pay particular attention to a small glass of liqueur introduced in the third scene. It looks like nothing at all ; it is brought in as a mere adjunct on a salver, it takes its place like a mere



'super' in a tragedy. Well, the whole of the piece hangs on that tiny glass of liqueur. Without it the piece becomes an impossibility, there is no way out of it, the *dénouement* lies virtually at the bottom of that tiny glass.

Finally, the fundamental point of a well-constructed plan is the *dénouement*. The art of unravelling, especially a comedy, is in some respects an almost new art. The public is more difficult to please with regard to it and the authors are more expert than of yore. I shall not be suspected of wishing to depreciate the memory of Molière when I say that in general he does not unravel his pieces, but simply finishes them. The moment he has finished portraying his characters, and developing their passions, he brings upon the stage, one knows not whence, a father who finds the long-looked-for son, one knows not how ; everybody embraces everybody else and the curtain goes down. That fashion of terminating a piece, by hook or by crook, would not be tolerated nowadays, one would have to be a Molière to dare do such a thing. Nowadays one of the first laws of the dramatist's art is to make the *dénouement* the logical and enforced consequence of the characters or the events of the play. The last scene of a play is often written before the first, because while that last scene has not been found there is virtually no piece, and as soon as the author has got hold of his *dénouement* he must not lose



sight of it for a moment and make everything subordinate to it. The novelist may at a pinch begin without knowing exactly whither he is going ; he may, like the hare of the fable, stop every now and then to browse the grass, to listen from which quarter the wind blows ; but the dramatic author is bound to take the tortoise as his model, though he must go at a somewhat quicker pace. In other words, he must start at the right moment and not loiter by the way. Above all, while advancing he must never lose sight of his goal.

Scribe is one of the authors of our time who was fully alive to the importance of the *dénouement* and who succeeded best in applying the severest laws to it. Nay, he applied these laws to the works of others also and most often to the works he admired most. One day I heard him in the heat of a conversation on the art of writing comedy, reconstruct two *dénouements* of Molière, that of 'Les Femmes Savantes' and that of 'Tartuffe.' 'What a pity,' he said, 'that Molière terminates that beautiful character-play like a genre comedy by the trivial artifice of a false piece of news, by a fictitious ruin. He had such a capital *dénouement* ready to hand. The conclusion sprang so naturally from the very entrails of the subject. I should have finished my piece with the admirable scene between Vadius and Trissotin. The picture of those two "prigs," abusing and unmasking one another, destroying their own and their dupes'

illusions would have terminated a masterly work in a masterly way. As for "Tartuffe" that is altogether different. As a rule people cavil at the *dénouement*; personally I think it admirable. First of all, it has that merit, as far as I am concerned, that without that *dénouement* we should probably not have had the piece at all, and there is very little doubt that Molière only got the play sanctioned by making the king one of the actors in it. Secondly, that *dénouement* is unquestionably a striking picture of the times. Here we have got an honest, upright man who has valiantly fought for his country and who having become the victim of the most obvious and most odious of machinations finds not a single hand stretched out to defend him either in society or on the part of the law. In order to save him, the sovereign himself has to intervene like the *Deus ex machina*. Where could we find a more terrible indictment against the reign itself than in that immense eulogy of the king. That's why I admire that *dénouement* so much,' said Scribe, 'and that's why I would change it if I had to write the piece to-day. To-day, in fact, the only sovereign is the law itself. The word of the sovereign simply means the articles of the Code. The code, therefore, should be entrusted with the rôle of Louis XIV; it is to the code I would look for my *dénouement*. I would change Cléante into a magistrate and when Tartuffe says, "The house belongs to me and I'll show you

that it does," Cléante should exclaim: "No, it does not belong to you, for you owe it to the generosity of a benefactor, to an absolutely free gift, and the law has provided for wretches of your stamp by these two avenging lines: 'Every donation may be revoked on the proof of the ingratitude of the recipient.' I dare you to come and claim this house before the law. If you do, you will find me there also with the patent proofs of your abominable ingratitude. You had better come then, but remember, I'll be waiting for you."'

Next to the plan of a comedy comes, as a matter of course, its style and the portrayal of its characters; before venturing to discuss these two subjects, I would dwell for a moment on a fundamental point of our art which, moreover, occupies a considerable place in Scribe's work and which partly constitutes its originality.

On the first night of 'Hernani,' Scribe occupied a box in the centre of the house on the first tier, I was in a side box on the second tier, and I watched him following the development of the piece with the closest attention, standing up all the while, and daring to laugh openly at the most sensational incidents. It was not only a bold thing to do, for he made himself a good many relentless enemies on that occasion, but it was also a bold profession of his dramatic, I might add, his philosophical, creed. The fact is that every comic author has within him the

making of a philosopher, I mean that he carries within him an aggregate of general ideas, a theoretic conception of life of which his comedies are only the realisation. He owes those general ideas either to his own nature or to the surroundings amid which he has been brought up, and they represent the part of his own thoughts and character in the work of his imagination, they constitute his social and moral part in the part in the play.

This dual part of Scribe was very considerable though it may be summed up in one line, Scribe represents the *bourgeoisie*. Born in the Rue St Denis, he remains throughout—and therein lies his strength—the man of the Rue St Denis, that is, the incarnation of that Parisian middle-class, hard-working frugal, honest, which perhaps lacks sentiment for everything that is great, the class which does not aspire to a very elevated ideal, but which is heir to those precious gifts of nature—commonsense, kind-heartedness and the domestic virtues.

Hence, Scribe's original place in the literature of the Restoration. He was the living and natural antithesis to romanticism. While 'Antony' dragged us with him, bewildered and intoxicated like himself, into the maelstrom of adulterous passion, while 'Hernani' made us frantic with enthusiasm for a band of brigands, while 'Marion Delorme' endeavoured to force upon us the dogma of the redemption of the fallen woman by pure love; he,

Scribe sang the praises of conjugal happiness, and selected for his heroines young girls who had not been subject to such temptations. One has but to take up the various works that compose Scribe's repertory, such as 'Le Mariage de Raison,' 'Une Chaîne,' 'Les Premières Amours,' 'Le Mariage d'Argent,' and at no matter which page we open them we shall find everywhere the defence of paternal authority, sense getting the better of passion. Scribe's muse is the 'feet-on-the-fender' muse, the 'bread-and-butter-cutting' muse, if you like, but it is the muse of the family home. The story goes that after seeing 'Le Mariage d'Inclination,' a young girl flung herself into her mother's arms, confessing her intention to elope; after a play by Alexandre Dumas she would have flung herself into the arms of her lover, saying, 'Take me away.'

The bourgeoisie is, furthermore, represented in Scribe's comedies by the patriotic sentiments with which these comedies teem. His *warriors*, his *medal-  
led veterans*, his fire-eaters, his colonels have raised many a smile since, as far as we are concerned they made us cry for we had not long ago been invaded and our wounds were by no means healed; each of his songs in his farcical comedies proved a consolation and a kind of revenge; unless I am very much mistaken we would not laugh at them nowadays.

Finally, Scribe was both a conservative and an agitator, supporting the throne and making sport of



the chamber; praising the King and satirising his Ministers in song, and especially pitilessly scourging those recantations which those who profited by them would fain have had us accept as conversions. In connection with that subject, I happen to remember a very interesting story, its date is the beginning of the second Empire, somewhere about 1854. One day, at some reception or other, Scribe happened to run against an important personage, an old school-fellow whom we will call M. de Verteuil. 'What are you doing?' asks his friend, 'some comedy on the stocks, I suppose?' 'Yes,' replies Scribe, 'I fancy I have got hold of a charming subject. I intend to put on the stage a 'Peer of France,' of the time of Louis-Philippe's reign,\* who becomes a senator under Napoleon III. You may see for yourself what a fund of comic traits I ought to extract from such a senator's recantations, from his awkward position in trying to reconcile his adherence of to-day with his adherence of formerly. I think it will be delightful.' At that moment the two friends were separated by a batch of guests and shortly afterwards Scribe went home, engrossed in thought and not very cheerful. The conversation had set him thinking. 'I am afraid,' he said to himself, 'that my subject is not as good as I fancied it to be; de Verteuil is a very clever man, I tried to give him a spirited account of my plot, but it went without a smile. There

\* The peers created by Louis-Philippe were only life peers.—TR.

is no mistake about it, he did not seem amused in the least, a bad sign that, I feel sure.' While talking to himself he mechanically opens the evening paper, and the first thing he sees is the following: 'M. de Verteuil, a former peer of France, has been called to the Senate.'

And now let us look for a moment at some of the characters of Scribe's plays and at his style. I may frankly confess that these show the two weak points in Scribe's works. He failed to look at humanity in any other light than that of the 'float.' He had a profound knowledge of men and women, but he invariably saw them like so many theatrical personages; hence, the curious fact that, though he has created a great number of very attractive parts, he has produced very few general and deeply pondered types. Not that life and truth are wanting in the characters he brings on the stage, his faculty of subtle observation enables him well enough to dissect and to depict boldly their foibles, their passions and aims; they talk as they should talk, they behave as they should behave in the situation in which they are placed, but they are only the men and women of that situation; they fill it adequately but never go beyond it. On the other hand, and to take only one instance, when one reads Shakespeare, his characters seem to be endowed with such powerful breath of general vitality, they are stamped with such individuality as to convey the idea that in every possible circumstance they would act

and carry themselves just as they are acting and carrying themselves in the situation in which they are presented to us at that moment. They are not only stage parts, they are men and women, and what is more, men and women equipped for the whole battle of life.

We look in vain for something similar in Scribe. He rarely conveys the idea of possessing the power to create strongly marked characters, and excepting 'Bertrand and Raton,' and the last and admirable scene of 'L'Ambitieux,' one is compelled to admit that his comedies are stage pictures rather than real pictures of the human heart.

His style is open to similar objections, the language of comedy should be at the same time a colloquial and a polished language, (*une langue parlée et une langue écrite*). To perceive this at once we have but to read 'L'Avare,' 'Le Festin de Pierre,' and 'Georges Dandin.' No doubt, it is Harpagon and Don Juan who speak, but we also feel that it is Molière who makes them speak. Scribe has only half of those gifts. His style has all the requisites of conversation, the conversation is natural, bright, it trips along and sparkles, but one regretfully notices the want of that richness of colouring and that surety of outline which alone constitute the great writer. He falls short in one other respect. A comic writer putting on the stage the characters of his own time is bound to give them the language of his own time, unfortunately there

is a great deal of jargon, consequently there are a great many ephemeral elements in that language. Odd to say, the feeling that 'springs eternal in the human breast' is subject to the most transitory form of expression. That part of a stage play which grows obsolete soonest is the love episode. Even such love letters as have been written to yourself, should you take them up after a lapse of years, will make you die with laughter. Their comic effect is in direct proportion to their tenderness. The art of the great dramatist is to distinguish in the current idiom the perishable element in order to borrow from that idiom only that which is strictly necessary to impregnate his dialogue with the tone and the flavour of the moment.

Molière writes both in the language of his time and in the language of all time; Scribe in virtue of his very scenic instinct, makes too much use of the dictionary of the Restoration. Finally the impetuosity, the despotism of his dramatic temperament led him to make everything subservient to the action of the play; absolutely everything, even to grammar, not from ignorance, for he knew his own language very well, but knowingly, and with deliberate premeditation. I happened to be present one day at a rehearsal of one of his pieces, when all at once one of his characters delivered himself of a slightly incorrect phrase. I suggested a more correct one. 'No, no, my dear boy,' says Scribe, 'your sentence is too long;

there is no time for it. My sentence is probably not very orthodox, but the action is proceeding apace, and the sentence must follow suit; that's what I call the economical style.' On the other hand, it is not from economical motives, but from necessity, that he wrote certain lyrical lines with which he is constantly being reproached, and of which reproach I would fain cleanse his memory. First of all, you may adopt it as a principle that whenever you meet with a very bad line in an opera that it is the composer and not the librettist who has perpetrated it. The despotism of the former is beyond most people's imagination, and no words can convey an idea of the fate of an elegant strophe when he happens to lay hold of it; he shatters it to pieces, he amputates it, he supplies artificial limbs to it; it is simply monstrous. The famous Alexandrine of the 'Huguenots'—

'Ses jours sont menacés. Ah! je dois l'y soustraire.'

was never written by Scribe, it belongs to Meyerbeer. Scribe had correctly written—

"Ce complot odieux  
Qui menace ses jours, ah! je dois l'y soustraire."

But that *qui* happened to be in Meyerbeer's way. Meyerbeer cut it out, and substituted his horrible hemistich, the unfortunate librettist backed it as one backs an accommodation bill, and when the bill was protested, it was he who paid. I am anxious to get to the fifth point of my dramatic survey, to the 'staging'



of a play, for there we shall find Scribe occupying the foremost rank.

## IV

The staging of a play, especially of a comedy, is also a wholly modern art. No doubt, in former days, the author wrote on his manuscript: 'The stage represents a drawing-room,' but there was nothing to show that the action did take place in a drawing-room. First of all, the *dramatis personæ* kept on their legs. We all recollect the actors at the Comédie-Française stepping to the footlights, side by side and delivering their speeches before the prompter's box. A clever writer who since then has been become an official personage wanted to introduce on the stage of the Comédie-Française what he called 'seated comedy.' Unfortunately, his piece turned out a failure and what he called 'seated comedy' became prostrate comedy. Scribe was one of the first to introduce on the stage the animation and bustle of real life. The very nature of his talent compelled him, as it were, to do so. His bustling, sparkling comedies, full of incidents and apparently spontaneous situations did not lend themselves easily to the sobriety of movement of the stage of yore. In reality, a manuscript of Scribe only contains part of his work, the part which is spoken; the rest must be enacted, the gestures must complete the meaning of the words, the intervals of silence are part of the dialogue and the small dots finish the sentence.

Has it ever struck you to compare the punctuation of a piece by Scribe with that of a piece by Molière? In Molière's each thought is virtually terminated by a stop, and in his dialogue he rings the changes according to the rhythm of the sentence itself, on stops and commas, double stops, (semi-colons), marks of interrogation and every now and then of exclamation. Scribe has added to these the small dots, that is, the unfinished sentence, the sentiment merely hinted at, the partly expressed thought. In proof of this, I might point out in 'La Camaraderie,' a monologue of a page in which I have counted eighty-three of those little dots. Truly, the monologue so full of reticence is that of a young girl, and young girls proverbially say only half of what they think.

Certain is it, though, that that system of small dots contains a wholly new school of stagecraft, and that Scribe was justified in saying that the staging of a play was equivalent to a second creation, to adding a new piece to the first.

Those who never saw Scribe conjure up a dramatic work from, what for want of a better term, I may call the limbo of the manuscript, those who never saw Scribe 'put a piece on the stage' and remain with it until it could stand alone, only know half of the real Scribe. I happened to be present one day at a rehearsal of 'Le Prophète': I happened to come in at the very moment when Scribe was arranging the grandiose revolt in the third act. I cannot do better

than ask the reader to picture to himself a general on the battlefield, he was here, there, and everywhere at the same time, he was enacting every part ; at one moment he was the crowd, the next the Prophet, the next the woman, then striding at the head of the insurgents with a fierce air, his spectacles pushed up to his forehead ; after that, and with his spectacles still on his forehead, rushing to the opposite side of the stage, and enacting the part of Berthe, pointing out to everyone his or her place, marking the bounds with a piece of chalk, at the exact spot where this or that actor had to stop ; in short, combining so skilfully the evolution of his diverse characters as to make their most animated movements perfectly well ordered and investing that order throughout with grace.

No sooner was the third act finished than we rushed away to the Comédie-Française to attend another rehearsal, that of the second act of 'Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre,' an act altogether different from the other, an act played by four characters only, an act of a more or less domestic, home-like nature.

And in accordance with the theme Scribe becomes all of a sudden a different man. The energy displayed but half-an-hour previously in handling large masses and in making them convey by their gestures and grouping some of the effects of popular passions, that energy had made room for a subtle, critical faculty of interpreting the most refined and delicately shaded feelings. Before his arrival the actors them-

selves had become conscious that the act wanted life, that it was dragging somewhat heavily along. No sooner does he set his foot on the stage, than, without adding a word, he 'besprinkles' the dialogue with such telling gestures, such effective attitudes, such ingenious pauses, he avails himself so adroitly of the chairs and tables, as of so many advantages of position as to emphasise the situation and to heighten the interest. His characters so vague in outline but a minute before, now stand out in relief; the action of the piece becomes clear, animated: full of life; a magician had touched it with his wand.

Nor is that all. The art of 'staging' became a kind of revelation to him. By the light of that small, dim lamp that stood on the rickety little table during rehearsals his manuscript revealed to him things he did not suspect of being there. He has often told me what happened to him with a very interesting drama, entitled 'Philippe,' which he had written in conjunction with Bayard and which turned on the mystery of an illegitimate birth.

The piece opened with the disclosure of that secret. Scribe, who was to attend the rehearsals, makes his appearance at the very moment the actor is revealing the secret to the public. 'It is too soon,' he exclaims, 'we must put off that revelation till the second scene.' Next morning the revelation is introduced into the second scene. 'Too soon,' he exclaims once more, 'it must be put off till the

third scene.' The revelation was put off accordingly, but Scribe still considered it too premature. He kept on deferring it until finally the original exposition became the *dénouement* of the piece.

Nevertheless, I feel bound to qualify my praise. If Scribe was the founder of the modern art of 'staging,' it is but fair to admit that two important parts of that art were utterly beyond his ken. He had no knowledge either of scenery or costumes. Odd to relate, it would be difficult to find an imagination going farther a-field than Scribe's and remaining so thoroughly within the limits of home. His imagination wandered through every country of the world, while at the same time it always remained in Paris. At the beginning of his comic operas and operas he put: 'The scene of the piece is laid at St Petersburg,' 'The scene of the piece is laid in Madrid,' 'The scene of the piece is laid in Pekin,' notwithstanding that the scene of the piece was virtually in Paris. When he wrote the words 'an inn,' 'a kitchen,' 'a palace,' his 'mind's eye' always perceived the selfsame inn, kitchen or palace. As for his characters, he mentally decked them out in all kinds of finery, not to say rags, which had not the slightest connection with the country in which those characters were supposed to live and act. He made them speak and bestir themselves, but as for housing and clothing them, he did not trouble about it. This defect, apparently altogether on the outside, was due to the deficiency in his



intellect to which I have already drawn attention. He lacked the gift of individualising. Fortunately he met with a marvellous collaborateur in M. E. Perrin. M. E. Perrin who had not only an instinctive taste for, but a practical knowledge of scenery and costume has often told me of Scribe's amazement at the sight of the transformation of his interiors and characters by a consummate stage manager.

I feel reluctant to wind up this essay on Scribe as a dramatist without mentioning another of his collaborateurs who may be termed unique in his own way, for that collaborateur was nothing less than a king.

About 1850 Scribe adapted Shakespeare's 'Tempest' into an operatic libretto.\* The English were very anxious to have it performed in London and Scribe went thither to superintend the rehearsals. His first visit on the day after his arrival was to Louis-Philippe. Scribe had never been a republican, it was one of the rare subjects on which we did not agree, he had, furthermore, been too warmly welcomed at the Tuileries not to undertake 'a pilgrimage' to Claremont.

Those who knew him said that Louis-Philippe was one of the most brilliant talkers of his time, and as a matter of course, he gracefully brought the conversation round to the subject of the 'Tempest,' then all of a sudden, in a semi-bantering, semi-serious tone, he remarked: 'Do you know, M. Scribe, that I have

\* Halévy, the composer of 'La Juive' was in London with Scribe at that time. Was it his opera?—TK

the honour of being a colleague of yours?' 'You, sire?' 'Yes, indeed, I. You have come to London for an opera; well, I also wrote an opera when I was a young man, and I give you my word it was by no means bad.' 'I can well believe that, sire; you have done more difficult things than that.' 'More difficult to you, perhaps, but not to me. I took for my subject the Cavaliers and Roundheads.' 'A good subject, sire,' assented the author of 'Les Huguenots.' 'Well, I happen to have come upon the manuscript very recently. Shall I give you an idea of it? I should like to have your opinion on it.' 'I am at your disposal, sire.'

Thereupon, Louis-Philippe in his most brilliant manner starts telling Scribe the substance of his first act, and at first Scribe sits listening, respectfully, without interruption as he would have listened to a speech from the throne, but gradually, as the piece proceeds, the playwright's feelings get the upper hand and he absolutely forgets that his interlocutor is, or at any rate was, a king; he forgets everything except that there is the scenario of an opera being submitted to him, and interrupting the speaker at a faulty passage, he says: 'Oh, that won't do at all.' 'Why won't it do?' asks the King, slightly nettled. 'Because it is improbable, and what's worse, devoid of interest.' 'Devoid of interest, devoid of interest,' repeats the King. 'My dear Monsieur Scribe, just allow me. . . .' But the King might have saved himself the trouble; Scribe

was 'off;' their respective parts had been reversed ; it was the author who was the king for the moment. 'Do you know what you want there, sire? You want a love scene there. Politics are well enough in a ministerial council, but in an opera we must have the love-passion.' 'In that case, let's have a love scene,' replies Louis-Philippe, laughing. And forthwith they begin to devise and to discuss until it is time for Scribe to return to town. 'Already,' says the King ; 'one moment, I'll not let you go unless you promise me to come and lunch with me to-morrow. Our opera is not finished. I shall expect you to-morrow.' 'Very well, sire, till to-morrow.'

Next morning on arriving at Claremont whom should he see standing sentry at the door of the King's study? The Queen, who was watching for him, apparently in a very excited state. 'May heaven bless you, M. Scribe,' she said. 'For the first time since we left Paris the King dined heartily last night, and during the whole of the evening he was cheerful and talked a good deal. This morning on entering his room he was sitting up in bed, rubbing his forehead as his ancestor Henri IV used to do when he felt puzzled and saying in a low voice to himself, "That confounded Scribe, he thinks it is a very easy matter." And he was smiling all the while. Oh, do come back, Monsieur Scribe, do come back as often as you can, every day if possible while you are in London. Will you promise me?'

Scribe promised and kept his word. For a whole week he went every morning to pour a few drops of joy on that broken heart, to shed a few rays of light into that mournful home, and on his return to France he brought back the most glorious author's fees he had ever received in his life, the gratitude of an exile, the affection of a deposed king and the blessings of a woman who was little short of a saint.

These recollections would be very incomplete if I omitted to show Scribe as a man and a friend. It would be worse than inaccuracy on my part, it would be a want of gratitude. One day, M. Thiers, alluding to himself said to me, 'After all is said and done, I am a good fellow.' I will paint Scribe with one word, he was 'a good fellow' in every possible sense of that charming word. A good fellow is unaffected; a good fellow is lively and gay; a good fellow is good and kind; a good fellow is artless, if not always, at any rate sometimes; a good fellow is modest. Well, Scribe was all that. We may take it that he could not have been ignorant of his own merits. Forty years of success must have pretty well enlightened him in that respect, but he really seemed to give them no thought. One day in the course of conversation some one quoted enthusiastically the trenchant remark of Royer-Collard with regard to M. \* \* \* 'He is not an ass, he is the ass.' 'I don't consider that so very extraordinary,' said Scribe, in the simplest way imaginable, 'I fancy I could find as good.' Is not this



delightful from the lips of a man who was so witty that people twitted him with being too witty.'

The following story will, however, give an absolutely striking portrait of him. Scribe generally spent the autumn months with his friends in the country. In the evening they amused themselves with reading English novels, and the reader was a poor governess who, in an interval between two chapters, said with a sigh, 'Ah, if I could only realise my dream.' 'And what may your dream happen to be, mademoiselle?' asked Scribe. 'To have one day, not now, but many years hence, an income of twelve hundred francs a year, which would insure my peace and quietness and independence.' A few weeks later, one evening, after she had come to the end of some insignificant novel, Scribe all of a sudden said to her, 'Do you know, mademoiselle, that there is a subject for a capital one-act comedy in that story, if you like we'll write it together, seeing that you gave me the subject.' As a matter of course the girl was but too glad to accept. Three days after, Scribe comes down to the drawing-room with his comedy finished and three months after that the papers announce its first performance. On the morning of the advertised *première*, Scribe repairs to his dramatic agents. 'To-night there is a *première* of a piece of mine, which has been written in conjunction with a lady,' he says. 'I have not the faintest idea what the result will be; this much I do know, that the piece will have to



yield twelve hundred francs a year for life to the joint-authoress. You may arrange the matter just as you please, provided it looks genuine.' Rather a delicate proceeding this on the part of Scribe, who has been so often accused of plagiarism, but who in this instance did not borrow his plot from any one, and who, I fancy, has not had many imitators in that respect. But the best of the story has to be told. The governess who had relished her success, kept constantly suggesting to Scribe new plots for comedies, drawn from English novels, which Scribe as constantly declined with a smile. After that, the governess, whenever they praised Scribe to her, protested in a soft, gentle, cooing tone. 'Yes, yes, there is no doubt about it, he is a charming young fellow. But I am afraid gratitude is not one of his pet virtues. We wrote a very pretty piece together, seeing that it brings us each twelve hundred francs per annum, why does he refuse to write another?' Scribe never dispelled her illusion.

Assuredly a man who is not only superior to most men but a good fellow to boot is a delightful phenomenon, not to mention the splendid faculty of imagination which not only concocts a pretty piece out of an indifferent novel, but makes it the basis of a kindly action.

## V

I have now come to the most 'delicate point in this essay. No doubt, old chums occupied a

large space in Scribe's life ; but 'petticoats' occupied a still greater. The latter enacted as many parts in his existence as they enacted in his pieces, or to put it correctly, they have all enacted the same part. Where, in fact, could he have found so many delightful love scenes, if not in his own heart? A woman who knew Scribe 'very well,' who, in fact, had had every possible opportunity of knowing him well, once gave me a description of 'Scribe in love.' I am alluding to Jenny Vertpré to whom Horace Walpole's *mot* on Mme. de Choiseul might well apply : 'She is the prettiest little fairy that ever came out of a fairy egg,' for it is the portrait of Jenny Vertpré herself. A young general of the First Empire having come to bid her good-bye just before starting for Russia, could not withstand the temptation and carried her off in his big cloak, and snugly ensconced in their carriage, they got as far as Dantzic, she cosily wrapped up in the cloak, like a bird in its nest. She was only sixteen, with eyes like a squirrel's, gleaming little teeth like those of a mouse, and hair the hue of the raven's wing. And with it all, such a figure and such a smile, not to mention her cleverness. When Scribe drew the delightful character of Mme. Pinchon, he wrote to her as follows : 'My dear Jenny ; I have drawn a part for you, made up of your own sayings.' She was the daughter of an actor of the Vaudeville and had grown up side by side, in fact, on the same story of the same house with Déjazet. Every morning the two

little girls went down to buy the milk and the charcoal for the two households. Trotting about together they compared notes as to their respective school learning. Déjazet could read, and Jenny Vertpré knew her catechism. The latter fact elicited the serious admission of Déjazet years afterwards to Jenny, that she loved her very much, 'because it is to you I owe my religious principles.' 'The comic part of the business,' added Jenny laughing, 'was that she meant what she said, for Déjazet has always been very devout. She always went to mass in the little village where she lived, after she retired from the stage.'

From Déjazet I led Jenny Vertpré to talk about Scribe.

'Oh, the scamp,' she said, 'he would not have been able to begin work without at least half-a-dozen letters from as many women on his table.' 'What was he like when young?' 'A kind of face such as one might find described in a passport. Nose average, forehead average, chin average, shape average, somewhat heavy. What distinguished him from the crowd was a pair of small green eyes, full of mischief and sparkle and never still, beneath enormous, bushy eyebrows. But there was above all, his mouth, with two dimpled corners like a child's. And with it all amusing, spruce and neat, with soft, cajoling ways, a regular "booby."' I protested. 'I am telling you the truth,' she added with her diabolical little smile, 'it was a positive sin

to deceive him, it was as easy as A, B, C.' I felt downright astonished. Scribe easily deceived. 'You are surprised,' she went on. 'That shows you did not know the Scribe of my days. My dear fellow, he was an absolute simpleton.'

To this portrait from a woman's lips I may add another, drawn by Scribe himself. We were talking about the Gymnase and the celebrated actor Gontier. 'Gontier,' said Scribe, 'was very clever at caricaturing people. 'One day, in the green-room, after having drawn several actors and actresses with more than his ordinary success, he starts another sketch which simply sets them all in a roar and frantic with delight. I am the only one who does not join in the general merriment. "Who is this?" I ask. "I don't know that thickhead." Thereupon the laughter grows all the louder. That "thickhead" was myself.' This was Scribe, every inch of him; never endeavouring to make himself out better than he was, never pluming himself upon anything, ever holding his tongue about his love affairs.

One night at the Opera ball, a masked woman comes up to him, begins to talk and finally puts her arm in his. Her very walk showed that she was young, and a pair of black eyes, flashing through the apertures in her mask, bred the supposition that she was good-looking. The conversation becomes more and more animated; the masked woman seemed to be clever and Scribe gets more and more excited. He



also begins to talk cleverly, becomes more pressing and his companion's resistance grows fainter and fainter. He offers the hospitality of his bachelor's quarters and the offer is accepted. In those days he lived near the Bourse, on the third floor of a large house. Off they go, in a little while they reach his home and are ascending the staircase. All of a sudden when they get to the first story, the lady stops. 'We are not there, yet,' says Scribe. 'Indeed, we are,' says the lady. 'I am sorry to contradict you,' replies Scribe merrily, 'one of these days I may be fortunate enough to live on the first floor, but at present. . . .' 'At present,' interrupts the lady, taking off her mask, 'at present it is I who am living there.' 'I don't understand, madame?' 'Yes, monsieur, this is my domicile, and now, good neighbour, allow me to thank you with all my heart. I lost my husband in the crowd and felt dead frightened. Fortunately for me I happened to fall in with the most charming of knight-errants who, for my edification, improvised one of the most delightful episodes and love scenes he ever put in his comedies, with the prettiest *dénouement* possible, for all of which kindness I feel sincerely obliged and for which my husband will come to thank him personally to-morrow.' Thereupon she sweetly curtsies to Scribe and disappears through her own doorway, leaving him on the landing, looking more or less sheepish, confused and grieved. Whether the lady felt touched by his re-



proachful and regretful parting glance, I am unable to say. The little comedy in one act may have had a sequel, but Scribe never breathed a syllable of it.

All his adventures, though, did not miscarry like this, inasmuch as he by no means took his love-affairs in a tragical spirit. He did not pretend to enact the Antony. As long as the girl was pretty, good-tempered and kind he did not trouble about the rest, and if she deceived him, provided it was done with a certain amount of cleverness, he put a good face upon the matter by being the first to laugh at it. In those days there was a favourite actress at the Vaudeville of the name of Pauline, with the most magnificent pair of black eyes I have ever seen in my life. Brunet was her manager and he managed to direct her away from the paths of virtue. About the same period, Scribe appeared upon the scene with a piece that ran for a hundred nights. Pauline took a fancy to him, which drove Brunet to despair at first, though he managed to resign himself to the fact afterwards. He made up for his misfortunes as a lover by his success as a manager. Pauline virtually tied Scribe to the theatre with silken bonds, and all would have been well but for the advent of a third thief in the shape of the handsome Dartois. That was more than Brunet could bear, and he rushed to Scribe's house. 'My dear fellow,' he exclaimed in a tone of despair '*we* are being deceived.' That *we* tickled Scribe to such an extent that he forgot his

own grief. The *plural* had the effect of reconciling him to the pluralism of pretty Pauline.

Things did not always work so smoothly, whether his inamoratas were faithful or not. When he was about forty, in addition to the casual and unimportant love-affairs which cropped up as frequently in his existence as they did in his pieces, in addition to these he had two serious *liaisons* which every now and then led to very comic predicaments. His two lady-loves were both married women, but separated from their husbands, consequently with all their time at their disposal, which fact militated against his own freedom. The mistress' freedom means the servitude of her admirer. At that particular period the whole of Paris was rushing to see 'Les Pilules du Diable.' As a matter of course, Scribe goes to see the piece, which does not strike him as very amusing. On his return at night, he finds the following little note, 'Every one is talking of "Les Pilules du Diable," which I am longing to see. Take a box for to-morrow, I'll be with you at seven.' 'Hum,' grunts Scribe, two doses of these pills in twenty-four hours is rather too much of a good thing. I suppose there is no help for it, so I had better get the box.' He swallows the second dose which he relishes even less than the first and gets home, not in the brightest of tempers. On his table lies a second note, couched as follows, 'My dear boy, they have worked me up to such a pitch about "Les Pilules du Diable," that I am

positively dying to see it, especially with you. Will to-morrow night suit you? of course it will. Take a box on the ground tier. I am looking forward to my evening with you as a great treat.'

As usual, Scribe resigned himself to his fate, for with his kind disposition, his insuperable reluctance to distress people, but especially a woman, he had not the courage to break off his relations with either of them. The utmost he did was to slacken his chain by means of some stratagem. One of his two queens and charmers, the elder by priority or age, I do not know which, had exacted a promise that he should pay her a visit every day from five till six. In exacting this promise the lady had not been prompted altogether by affection, or at any rate, there was a good deal of calculation in that affection. She was anxious to have this daily call construed into a public recognition of her sway over Scribe. He faithfully kept the appointment, only two or three times a week, after a quarter of an hour or so of conversation, he took up his stand against the mantel-piece, and putting his arm behind his back, managed to put forward the hand of the clock; then turning round, he exclaimed: 'Six o'clock already, I must go! How quickly time flies in your company.'

Goethe tells us that he transformed his love sorrows into odes, and that his grief vanished, borne away on the wings of his muse. Scribe avenged himself for the thousand and one worries of his liliputian bonds,

by converting them into two of his most delightful comedies, viz. : 'Les Malheurs d'un amant heureux,' and 'Une Chaîne.' Finally though, when about fifty he became once more master of his own destiny by a bold stroke—he got married. That *dénouement* may be reckoned among one of the very best of all his comedies. First of all, like the skilful playwright he was, he prepared that *dénouement* long beforehand. At the outset of his double *liaison* he had declared on his oath to both his mistresses, not once but a hundred times that, had they been free, he would have married them. Later on he swore to them that if they became widows he would marry them. 'The years are going by,' he said to them, 'I will wait for you until I am fifty. But let it be understood that at fifty, if you are not free, I will be.' Heaven alone could tell of the fervent supplications he addressed to it for the health and long life of those two husbands. Not his best friend inspired him with a similar solicitude for his wellbeing. Heaven granted his prayers, both husbands kept their health. He married as he had said he would, shortly after his fiftieth birthday, and three months after his marriage both husbands departed this life. 'Great heavens, can you imagine my position if that misfortune had happened three months earlier?' he exclaimed. 'How could I have possibly got out of the difficulty? The very thought of it makes me shudder. After all,' he added, 'I could not have married them both.'



With his married life, Scribe entered upon the happiest period of an existence which had been happy throughout. His reputation was at its zenith and the full cup of unalloyed joy at his lips. 'My dear fellow,' he often said, 'up till now I only knew what pleasure meant, at present I know what happiness means.' His wife was comparatively young, barely thirty, good-looking, lively, kind-hearted and a woman of parts. Béranger, who knew her and whose songs she sang in a very talented manner, said of her that she was strong enough intellectually to govern an empire. Twelve years went by in that way without the faintest shadow on the picture, without a cloud in the sky. After that period when I happened to remind him one morning of the almost unheard-of and uninterrupted success and happiness of his life, he said to me in a sad tone: 'No one knows where the shoe pinches except he that wears it.' I dared not question him, but I noticed that from that day forward his imagination was not as bright as it had been. When talking about the subject of a play, he invariably proposed painful and more or less bitter subjects. 'You have often asked me,' he said one day, 'to provide a sequel to our four brilliantly successful pieces. Well, I'll give you a title which is an idea in itself.' 'Let us hear the title,' I said. 'L'Amour d'un Vicillard' (The love-passion of an old man.) I could not help frowning, seeing which he went on quickly. 'Wait a moment,' he said. 'I have no intention to write



another "Hernani" or "École des Vieillards." What I would like to portray is the sorrows of an old man who is being tenderly beloved. Do you follow my meaning, he said "tenderly beloved." 'Yes, yes, I understand; it would be the companion picture to "Les Malheurs d'un amant heureux." But would the subject be interesting to the public?' 'Undoubtedly it would, for it would be absolutely new, true and I might say, tragic. It would deal with a secret phase of human life which has up till now escaped observation, at any rate as far as the stage goes. We men may and often do love an ugly woman, a stupid woman, even a spiteful and bad-tempered woman, but never an old woman. On the other hand with women, and I say this in their praise, for it proves that their love proceeds from their souls more often than it does with us, the fame of a man, his talent, his heroism may blind them to his years. General Cavaignac was over fifty when in June (1848) he saved Paris from a revolution. That victory aroused the enthusiasm of several girls who fell in love with and wanted to marry him.' 'My dear friend,' I answered, 'to that instance I could add one much more striking and which bears absolutely on your subject. The old man of whom I want to tell you was over sixty and your title seems expressly made for him, so much did he suffer from loving and being beloved.' 'Who was that, I wonder? Béranger?' 'Yes, Béranger, it is evident that you do not know

the thing that befell him at Tours.' 'No, I do not know it.' 'Very well, let me tell you. Béranger who had retired temporarily to Tours met with a young girl, an English girl, who became so deeply enamoured of him that she proposed to leave everything and to elope with him. What was the result? That he, Béranger, the man who had sung "Frétilton" and "Lisette"-and who until then had known none but facile and evanescent love-adventures became deeply enamoured at the age of sixty-two, that he conceived a mad, intense passion which pierced his heart like an arrow, which fired his soul like a blaze. But he remained Béranger, he knew that that girl had a father and mother whose joy and pride she was. He was not going to end up a long honourable existence by committing an infamous act; a man does not rid himself at will of three score of years of honesty and uprightness. He would have become an object of horror and disgust to himself, if, however madly in love, he had taken advantage of that young girl's blind and unreasoning passion. By a tremendous effort of will he tore himself away from Tours and hid himself in a small village near Paris, at Fontenay, like some poor, wounded animal which withdraws to the dense growth in the wood to let the blood from his wounds flow freely and then cleanses them in the limpid forest-brook. During a whole twelvemonth, mark what I tell you, during a whole twelvemonth, he lived there by himself, withholding

his address from his dearest friends, disguising himself by means of large blue spectacles in order to escape recognition and patiently awaiting there, while wandering through the woods, the end of his agony. He had the reward of his courage, at the end of the twelvemonth he went back into the world, if not absolutely cured, at any rate perfectly self-controlled.'

I had got thus far with my story, when Scribe, who had been listening with intense emotion, turned very pale, and pressing his hands against one another, said all of a sudden in a scarcely audible voice, and with ill-suppressed sobs: 'My dear good friend, Béranger's story is absolutely like mine.' 'Like yours?' I exclaimed in amazement. 'Yes, I also, at the age of sixty or more, have suddenly, and for the first time in my life felt that bewildering, maddening sensation which we call an intense passion. I also met, not with a young girl, but with a young woman, willing to throw everything to the winds for, to sacrifice everything to, me. And like Béranger, I beheld, uprising before me, my advanced age, my life, all I have been, and all I have done. You have just said it, a man does not rid himself at will of an honourable and honest past. All the pieces in which I have sung the praises and the holiness of the matrimonial tie, of the purity of home life, of love hallowed by reason, flung their weight upon me at once. Then, there was my wife, my dear wife whom I would have driven to despair. And there was something else besides. I

was thinking of my enemies, my enemies in the press who would have soon discovered the secret and converted it into a scandal. Did not they go as far to incriminate even my paternal affection for one of my nieces. When I came to reflect upon all this, my commonsense, my most deep-seated affections, my horror of having my name bruited about, gave me courage and a twelvemonth ago I broke off what as yet was not a bond. But heaven alone knows at the cost of how much suffering. One single fact will be sufficient to prove that to you. About a month ago I went back to society for the first time; namely, to a grand ball at the Hotel-de-Ville. The first person I saw on entering the grand gallery was she, she radiant with beauty and animation, and waltzing round with a charming young fellow. One look at her was sufficient. Jealousy sees more in one glance than a hundred pair of ordinary eyes. I understood, as if I had read it in an open book that, deserted by me she had, either out of pique or from innate fickleness flung herself headlong into some other love-passion. The young fellow with whom she was dancing was her lover. I felt such a sharp pang at my heart that I sank back on the nearest couch, utterly undone and remained motionless for a quarter of an hour. When I rose to go, I found myself confronted with an unknown personage who was so pale and looked so crushed with despair, that I could not help saying to myself: 'Poor fellow, how much he must have



suffered. The poor fellow was no one but myself. I had passed in front of a looking glass and had failed to recognise my own face. In short, my dear friend, if you and I were to go out at this moment and if I were to run against her suddenly in the street, I feel that I should drop senseless on the pavement.'

This disclosure on Scribe's part had the effect of drawing me still closer to him, a wholly new man had been revealed to me. He had shown an intensity of passion the capacity for which I did not as much as suspect, a heroism of which I did not think him capable.

His energetic resistance met with its reward. In the course of time even the scar of his painful wound disappeared ; the last years of his life were years of happiness and by his sudden death, which struck us all like a thunderclap he was spared the sadness almost inseparable from moral and physical decline. Twenty-six years have gone by since that sorrowful March day in 1861, and at present when I look back upon him through the vista of the past he is to me what I feel convinced he will remain to posterity—the most complete representative of French theatrical art in the nineteenth century. Some of his contemporaries did, no doubt, surpass him in many phases of that art, but not one has possessed in the same degree, the two fundamental qualities of our national art, invention and the faculty of composition. No one created so many subjects for dramatic represen-



tations as he. No one proved himself master of so many different *genres* as he. No one knew as well as he, how to lay down the basis of a plot, to conduct it through its various windings, to tie and untie its knots. Here is a final and conclusive proof of his talent. In two of the *genres* he illustrated he was without a rival during his own lifetime and has had no successor since he died. Who since that death has written a beautiful libretto for an opera or a masterpiece in the way of a comic opera? I will not venture to call Scribe a man of genius, but he had certainly a remarkable genius for the drama, and withal so original that no literature has produced, I will not say his equal, but an author analogous to him. Scribe deserves to have applied to him the line of Michelet on Alexandre Dumas: 'He is one of Nature's forces.'

## CHAPTER V

Rachel.—Why 'Adrienne Lecouvreur' was written.—Rachel changes her mind; the Piece declined by the Committee of the Comédie-Française.—The Race of Managers to get hold of the Play.—M. Legouvé's determination to impose the Play upon Rachel.—His success.—Rachel at Rehearsal.—An evil foreboding.—Rachel asks M. Legouvé for another Piece.—He writes it.—The result.—Rachel as a Dramatic Adviser.—Rachel in her True Character.—Her last Days.

### I

AS I have already said, 'Adrienne Lecouvreur' had been written at the request of Mdlle. Rachel, I might say at her earnest entreaty. But the few months we spent in writing the piece, were spent by Mdlle. Rachel in taking a dislike to it. Fickle both by imagination and by temperament, her lack of firmness aggravated the defect. She consulted everybody, and anyone could influence her. The mere banter of a critic was enough to set her against an idea, which but five minutes before had delighted her, and the same thing happened in the case of 'Adrienne.' Her would-be advisers managed to frighten her about this projected excursion into the realms of drama. The idea of Hermione and

Pauline condescending to speak in prose, the daughter of Corneille and Racine becoming the godchild of M. Scribe seemed nothing less than sacrilege to them. Hence, on the day appointed for the reading of the piece, Mdlle. Rachel came to the meeting of the Committee, fully resolved to decline the part. Everyone had made it a point to come. The actresses, who at that time were privileged to vote, mingled with the actors, and a certain 'Daniel-come-to-judgment' air which pervaded the meeting, inspired me on entering with evil forebodings. Scribe took up the manuscript, and began to read. I ensconced myself in an armchair, and began to 'take stock.' In another moment or so two comedies were being unfolded before me, ours and the other; the latter a silent one, enacted in the hearts and minds of the *sociétaires*. Vaguely apprised of the secret intentions of their illustrious fellow-actress, they were virtually in a predicament.

A play written for Mdlle. Rachel, and in which she no longer desired to act, might, if accepted by the Committee, give rise to serious difficulties, nay to litigation. The Committee, therefore, took their cue for the verdict on 'Adrienne' from Mdlle. Rachel's face; the face remaining absolutely unmoved, theirs followed suit. During those five long acts, she neither smiled, applauded, nor gave a sign of approval; they neither approved, applauded nor smiled. The general apathy was so thorough, that Scribe, fancying that one of our

judges was about to drop into a sound slumber stopped short and observed :

‘Don’t mind me, my dear fellow, I beg of you.’ The *sociétaire* in question protested most strongly against the soft impeachment, and that was the sole effect produced throughout. Stay, I am mistaken, there was another, or at any rate the beginning of one. In the last scene but one of the fifth act, Mdle. Rachel, impressed by the situation in spite of herself, slightly leaned forward in her chair, in which up till then she had been apparently buried. She evidently thought it worth her while to be interested and to listen, but seeing that I noticed the movement she immediately collapsed, and resumed her stony look. When Scribe had finished reading, he and I passed into the room of the director, who in a few minutes joined us. In a tone of regret, which we accepted as sincere, he told us that Mdle. Rachel failed to ‘fancy herself’ in the part we had written for her, and as the play had been written at her own and special request the Committee would prefer to ‘consider the reading as null and void. ‘In other words,’ said Scribe, ‘our piece is rejected. Very well ! Every dog has his day.’

Next morning three different managers called to ask us for our play. Scribe was fond of reprisals that looked like revenges, and considered that they should be inflicted, ‘red hot’ ; he, therefore wanted to accept, but I objected. ‘My dear friend,’ said I to him, ‘the

piece was written for the Théâtre-Français, and the Théâtre-Français shall produce it. The part was written for Mdlle. Rachel, and Rachel shall play it.'

'But how will you make her do it?' 'That I do not know at present, but it must and shall be? In the course of our work to which you have contributed the lion's share, you were kind enough to tell me more than once, that I understand the part of Adrienne better than yourself. Indeed I may say that I have always discerned a new kind of stage character in that tragic actress, who has slowly been converted to the noble sentiments of the tragic heroines she represents, in that interpreter of Corneille, some of whose greatness has gradually been infused in her blood. Well, in my opinion that character should not be played on any other stage but that devoted to the masterpieces of Corneille.'

The evident sincerity of my conviction had the effect of convincing Scribe ; it was nevertheless a hard tussle. The aforementioned directors returned to the charge and with greater vigour ; one of these in order to force our hand, said : 'My leading lady has never had a chance yet to die on the stage, and would be delighted to die of poison.' This argument, however specious, failed to influence me, but six months having elapsed without a change in the position, Scribe declared that he would wait no longer. 'I will only ask you to wait for another week,' I answered.



‘You intended to spend six or seven days at Séricourt ; you had better go. If, on your return, I have made no progress, I’ll give in.’ ‘I shall expect you to breakfast this day week at eleven,’ he replied, and went away.

Then I went to work. I called upon the new director who had meanwhile been appointed to the Théâtre-Français, and made a little speech to him somewhat to the following effect : ‘You are no doubt aware of Mdlle. Rachel’s refusal to play our piece. This refusal on her part may be a mistake or not, I will not discuss it. But I am certain of one thing, that she has undoubtedly done us a great wrong. It is not fair to return his play to a man like M. Scribe, after having asked him to write it. One does not offend an author who stands in the very front rank, in that manner, nor, if you will permit me to say so, a younger man, who does not altogether stand in the last. Mdlle. Rachel must be aware of all this, and a moment’s reflection on her part will make her feel the justice of my remarks. A woman gifted as she is, cannot possibly be completely devoid of the sense of what is fit. Now there is one way of arranging the thing, both in her interests and in our own. I am not going to ask her to play our piece, but I want her to allow me to read it to her personally, and not at the theatre, with her comrades in attendance, but at her own house, and in the presence of friends of her own.’ She may invite whomsoever she pleases, and

as many or as few as she likes. I will come alone with the manuscript. Should the play fail to please her and that new committee, I will withdraw and admit that I have had a fair hearing. If, on the other hand, it pleases her and them, she will play it and score a great success. She will look upon me for ever afterwards as her best friend.'

The director transmitted my offer which was accepted, though on that same evening Mdlle. Rachel was reported to have said to one of her female friends: 'I cannot decline M. Legouvé's offer, but I shall never play this . . . .' I refrain from writing down the word, which, though expressive to a degree, is altogether outside the classical repertory. An appointment was made for the next day but one, the jury selected by the actress herself was composed of Jules Janin, Merle, Rolle, and the director of the Théâtre-Français.

On my arrival I no doubt felt somewhat nervous, but nevertheless, thoroughly self-possessed, because I was sure of the justice of my cause, though prepared for the struggle. My preparations were not formidable. Scribe was an admirable reader, and had rendered our dialogue in a marvellous manner before the Committee. He fell short, however, in one thing. In my opinion the part of Adrienne had not been made sufficiently appropriate by the reader to Mdlle. Rachel. He had read the part with a great deal of spirit and grace, but he had read it as one reads the part of a

‘walking lady.’ His delivery had been wanting in grandeur, and he had not sufficiently indicated the heroism smouldering in the woman. Now this was precisely the point by which one might hope to interest Mdle. Rachel, to acclimatise her to this novel kind of stage-character.

To her the enterprise was obviously fraught both with danger and difficulties, and we were bound to lessen as much as possible the former, and to smooth away the latter. We had to indicate to her in reading the part the best means of transition from one line of characters to another, and to convince her that what to the audience would appear something akin to a metamorphosis, would in reality be to her a mere change of costume. This appeared to me the point on which Scribe had not laid sufficient stress, and so for two days I took great pains to accentuate it and bring it into proper relief. I was welcomed in a charming manner, full of that ‘soothing’ grace which was as it were part of herself. She herself sweetened the glass of water I might want, she herself fetched me a chair, she herself drew back the curtains to give me a better light, I could not help remembering the famous phrase: ‘I shall never act this . . .’ and I chuckled inwardly at this lavish display of amiability, the more so as I knew the cause of this pretty piece of acting. How, in fact, should I be able to accuse of ill-will and prejudice a listener so graciously disposed to listen. It is what in theatrical parlance

we call a 'led-up-to' effect. I begin reading. During the whole of the first act, Mdlle. Rachel applauded, approved, smiled, in short, did the very opposite of what she had done in the presence of the Committee. Why all that? Echo answered Why, but I had no difficulty in fathoming her plan. She had learned her lesson to perfection. Her excuse would be, that the part did not suit her style. Seeing that Adrienne does not appear at all in the first act, Mdlle. Rachel was perfectly safe in praising it, nay, her very praise would lend an air of impartiality to her subsequent reserve, and a semblance of sincerity to the expression of regret which would accompany her refusal. But her very cleverness proved a big blunder, for the moment her friends perceived her satisfaction, they joined in it. They took to applauding without stint, and the reader encouraged by their applause grew more animated. At the beginning of the second act I felt confident of having my audience in hand. I set every stitch of canvas, scudding before the breeze of success, before that kind of electrical current so well known to all playwrights, and which takes all of a sudden possession of the house, the moment victory is declared. In the second act Adrienne makes her appearance, holding in her hand the part of Bajazet, which she is studying. The Prince de Bouillon takes a few steps towards her, and says in a captivating tone: 'What are you in quest of now?' to which she



replies : 'I am in quest of the truth.' At this repartee Janin cried, 'Bravo !' 'Oh, oh,' said I to myself, 'here is at least one friend'; for after all the repartee did not deserve such praise. Mdlle. Rachel had also turned towards Janin, as if to say : 'Has he turned traitor ?' Luckily the traitor's opinion was soon shared by everyone present. Mdlle. Rachel, surprised and somewhat disconcerted at her inability to summon to her aid the indifference that had marked the first reading, slowly yielded, though still resisting, to the generally favourable impression. After this second act, warmly applauded by all, she said languidly : 'I have always considered this act the prettiest.' This was her last attempt at resistance, for at the third act she bravely threw her former opinion overboard, precisely as some politicians do with the opinions they held but the day before. She applauded, laughed and wept in turns, adding now and then, 'What an idiot I was.' And after the fifth act, she flung herself into my arms, embraced me cordially and exclaimed : 'Why did you not take to the stage ?'

The reader had saved the author. Of course I could not but feel flattered, seeing that some time previously after having heard M. Guizot speak in the chamber, she had exclaimed : 'How I should like to play tragedy with that man !' Next day at the stroke of eleven I entered Scribe's room. 'Well,' he said with a mischievous look, 'what is the state of affairs ?'



Instead of answering, I took from my pocket a paper and read aloud : ‘Comédie-Française, this day at twelve o’clock, rehearsal of “Adrienne Lecouvreur.”’ ‘What!’ he shouted. Thereupon I told him everything, and next morning, the serious work of rehearsing began. I learned a great deal from it. Every day at ten, I went to Mdlle. Rachel’s either with Scribe or by myself if he happened to be prevented by the staging of ‘Le Prophète,’ and until half-past eleven we went through the act that was to be rehearsed at the theatre. The play was mounted in eight-and-twenty days, not one of which passed without this double rehearsal—one in the morning, the other in the afternoon. It was during that time that I conceived my admiration for Mdlle. Rachel’s perseverance, perspicuity, faculty of assimilation, modesty and good fellowship. Not an atom of the vanity so common to the great artist, not the smallest whim of the spoilt child of success ; she was entirely given up to her art, and sacrificed everything to her art. She listened to hints, discussed them, gave in the moment she was convinced, but not a moment before. Here is a striking proof. Those who have seen her Adrienne will recollect that one of her most telling effects of the fifth act was the cry of ‘Ah ! Maurice,’ when in the midst of her delirium she recognises her lover. If ever there was a theatrical cry that sounded like an inspiration of the moment, it was that one. Well, it took Rachel three days, not

exactly to discover the real pitch of it, but to accept it. Scribe had given her the key ; she resisted Scribe, she resisted me. 'It sounds false !' she maintained obstinately, 'it sounds theatrical.' 'It sounds false because you spoil it in delivery,' replied Scribe, who could be very rough and tenacious on the battlefield, that is, during rehearsals. At last, after three days of miscarried attempts, the cry entered her very heart, and she reproduced it with admirable inaccuracy. I say inaccuracy, because on her lips this cry became sublime. That was one of her special gifts, you handed her a penny, and she transmuted it into a louis.

Those rehearsals have left another recollection thoroughly characteristic of her. A few days before the first performance the theatre was closed for an evening rehearsal. Scribe was detained at the Opera and did not put in an appearance. The first four acts took us till eleven o'clock, then everybody left except Mdlle. Rachel, M. Regnier, M. Maillard and myself. All at once Mdlle. Rachel said to me, 'We are kings of all we survey, suppose we were to try the fifth act which we have not yet rehearsed. I have been studying it by myself for the last three days and would like to see the effect.' We went on to the stage, the gas was turned off, consequently there were no foot-lights, there was nothing but the traditional small lamp by the side of the prompter's box shorn of its occupant ; the audience consisted of the fireman on duty, dozing away on a chair between the wings,

and myself in the stalls. At the first sound of her voice, I became deeply impressed by her delivery ; never had I seen her so true to nature, so simply yet so powerfully tragic. The light of the smoky little lamp cast livid shadows on her face and the emptiness of the house imparted a strange sound to her voice. It was mournful to a degree. When the act was finished, we went back to the green-room. As I was passing in front of a looking-glass, I was struck by the pallor of my face, and still more so by the looks of M. Regnier and M. Maillard who were equally pale. As to Mdlle. Rachel, she had seated herself away from us, and did not utter a word, every now and then her frame shook, and she was still brushing the tears from her eyes. I went up to her and in the guise of praise pointed to the perturbed faces of her fellow actors. 'My dear Mademoiselle Rachel,' I said taking her hand, 'you played that fifth act as you will never play it again !' 'I think so too,' she replied, 'and do you know why ?'

'Yes ; because there was nobody there to applaud you, because you did not give a moment's thought to the effect, because for the time being you were poor Adrienne herself dying in the middle of the night in the arms of her two friends.' She remained silent for a moment, then said, 'You are altogether mistaken. A much stranger phenomenon took hold of my mind. I did not weep for Adrienne, I was weeping for myself. A nameless something told me all at once that I, like

Adrienne, should die young. I seemed to be in my own room breathing my last, I was watching my own deathbed. When I uttered the words: "Farewell ye triumphs of the stage: Farewell! ye delights of the art I have loved so well," I was shedding real tears. It was because I was thinking with despair, that time would efface all traces of what was my talent once, and that soon there would remain nothing of her who was once Rachel!

## II

The success of 'Adrienne' had inspired Mdlle. Rachel with great confidence in me. She said openly that I had given her talent a new lease of life, by making her strike out a new line against her own inclination. Our rehearsals had shown her that I was as capable of teaching her how to play a woman's part as of writing one, and she asked me to help her in taking yet another forward step. In Adrienne she had deserted poetry for prose, the antique for the modern, the peplos and the chlamys for the brocaded gown; she now wanted to play an absolutely modern part in a walking dress. She no longer wanted to be a heroine but a woman in society, in other words: 'Mdlle. Rachel.' I proposed 'Louise de Lignerolles' to her. She had seen Mdlle. Mars in the part, and been deeply impressed; but the thought of challenging comparison tempted her rather than frightened her. 'Read your piece to me,' she said, 'and we'll see.'



I did read it to her, she played the part, and scored a triple success ; a success due to her talent, a success due to her beauty, and last, a success due to the elegance of her dresses. The last was all the more pleasing to her, seeing the treasury paid for it—heaven alone knows, with what an outcry. Four dresses costing 1500 francs the four—the theatre was positively being ruined. Nowadays they would cost 6000 francs and be paid for without a murmur, which would be the right thing. This second success still further strengthened the bonds between Mdlle. Rachel and myself. I was almost looked upon as a friend. She did me the honour to ask my advice about some of her other parts. One evening she read to me Emile Augier's drama 'Diana' which she was then rehearsing and this reading of the play confirmed an opinion I had long held, namely, that there is a vast difference between reading and acting. An excellent reader might make but an indifferent comedian, and an excellent actor but an indifferent reader, the two arts differing almost entirely from one another. The actor represents only one character in a play, whereas the reader has to represent them all. The one has only the instrument of his voice to aid him, the other is assisted by his dress, his gestures, his bearing, and his facial play, so much so that Mdlle. Rachel who played the touching part of 'Diane' with remarkable talent, read the piece itself in an altogether ordinary way. She afforded me, furthermore, the greater



pleasure of enacting before me and for me alone, with her sister Mdlle. Sarah Felix, the scene between Célimène and Arsinoë.

It was a clever, incisive, effective reading, but wanting in youthful sparkle and gaiety. Youth and loveliness are indispensable to save the part of Célimène from becoming odious. When they had finished the scene, I laughed and told her that it was very nice, but that her Célimène was a woman of forty. Finally, one day, after a long discussion on women's parts on the stage, she asked me to write one expressly for her. 'If you will do this for me,' she added, smiling, 'I will write you a letter without a single mistake in the spelling.' In order to carry out this third attempt, I conceived the idea of a tragedy which should be both ancient and modern. Let me explain. During the last forty years, antiquity has, as it were, become a new world to us. Numberless critical, archæological, historical, numismatical and artistic studies have all of a sudden thrown a new light on the habits, beliefs, monuments, and labours of antiquity. The Greek drama has, as it were, been recalled to life by the researches of German scholars, and by the learned and ingenious work of M. Patin on the three great tragic writers. Fortified by these new revelations, I took up a subject which had always attracted me by reason of its very mysteriousness, namely, Medea. I felt that the Greek poet had not said the last word on

the subject. I saw that this mother's heart would bear still further probing, and that one might draw still more powerful effects from even the most beautiful scenes. One scene tempted me more than the rest ; I mean the description of Creusa's death. Medea, in token of submission, sends her sons to Creusa, with presents of rare beauty, namely, a crown of gold and a peplos of the finest workmanship. Euripides tells us in delightful verse the unfeigned joy of the young girl at the sight of those presents. 'She placed this crown on her head, she draped the peplos in tasteful folds on her bosom,' he says, 'she dressed her hair before a bright mirror, smiling at her own reflection, then having risen from her throne she walked up and down her chamber with graceful steps, her feet encased in white sandals, and craning her neck to catch a glimpse of the back of her figure.'

Suddenly, however, she changes colour, trembles violently from head to foot, and the poet in his admirable narrative proceeds to show her to us in the act of tearing away the crown which sets her head on fire, and shrieking with agony as she falls swooning into the arms of her old slave.

What a magnificent scene this would make, I said to myself, if instead of being read, it were enacted ; if, instead of sending them by her children, Medea herself were to take the presents, if, instead of an aged slave, Medea herself were to help Creusa apparelling herself. Fancy Medea on her knees, bowed down and

assuming the part of a servant, Medea watching her rival's every expression of artless delight, then all of a sudden bounding towards Creusa, already writhing with excruciating pain, and replying to her with savage glee: 'What does this mean? It means that you must die!'

What a splendid situation! What a contrast to depict for an actress like Mdlle. Rachel. With my mind full of the idea, I set to work immediately, and wrote the scene in two days. When it was finished, the remaining incidents of the drama as it had presented itself to my mind, gradually grouped themselves around the scene, and after a twelvemonth's work, I took my play to Mdlle. Rachel. Her first glance at it boded me no good, she frowned at the very title, but this did not dishearten me knowing her as I did, and remembering her refusal to play Adrienne. Consequently, when I had finished reading, I said in an off-hand tone: 'Well?' 'Well,' she replied, 'I expected something more original, you must remember I have already played so many Greek parts.' 'But Medea is not a Greek in my drama, she is a Barbarian.' 'Another thing, I have never played the part of a mother.'

'All the more reason why you should begin to do so. 'How do I know that I shall be able to express the feelings of a mother on the stage?' 'Your own motherly love! Why should you not be able to express that which you so intensely feel?' 'In the second

and third acts I have come upon sudden transitions from fury to sobbing, I don't know how to do that kind of thing.' 'I do,' I laughed, 'and I'll teach you.' That was the way in which I managed to imbue her gradually with the idea of the character I had tried to sketch, that is, without deliberately contradicting her, by the alternate use of argument and persuasion, by constantly keeping in view both the receptive and non-receptive, the docile and refractory qualities of that rare intelligence, until, at last, she threw herself into the study of 'Medée' with the same passion she had shown in the cases of Adrienne and Louise.

I shall never forget one of those days of study. I was expected at ten o'clock in the morning at the small villa she then rented at Auteuil. On my arrival I found her in the garden, gathering flowers, tying them into bouquets; she was in a merry mood, laughing, as happy as a child, the very fact of living filled her with joy. 'I am pleased to see you,' she said, 'we'll set to work with a will. I feel particularly well to-day. What a blessing it is to feel well. I have done with all the follies of youth, they are too dear at the price, and after all there is nothing compared to the joy of breathing the fresh air, gladly, and without restraint. I feel sure we shall get on capitally to-day.' I asked her if she would like to try the great scene between Medea and Creusa, the terrible scene already alluded to.

'If you like,' she replied, 'we had better begin at



once.' However, after a few minutes of work and preliminary essay, during which she seemed uncertain of her powers and doubtful of her effects, she suddenly stopped.

'My dear friend, do you know what we must do,' she said, 'we must cut out that scene.'

'Are you joking?' I replied, 'what, cut out the most powerful, the most novel, and the most effective scene in the whole of the three acts as far as you are concerned?' 'Never mind me and my effects; let us look to the part and above all, to the play. It's my opinion that this scene kills the piece, because it kills the interest in it.'

'You cannot surely mean what you say,' I replied, 'the interest positively converges towards this.' 'Yes,' an interest of horror and sickening terror, but that is not what we want in the third act. Just reflect for a moment that I have to slay my children, and remain sympathetic all the while. I repeat "sympathetic," whilst killing them. How can I command sympathy five minutes after committing an atrocious deed, after murdering in cold blood, treacherously and foully? The murder of Creusa on the stage, makes the murder of the children impossible; the one drags down the other, and I become simply a wholesale murderess. I feel the loss of that scene as well as you do; I am perfectly aware of what I could make of it, but—afterwards, I would fail to believe in the reality of my tears.'



For a moment I looked at her without replying ; I confess I was amazed at seeing a woman of no education formulate instinctively and by sheer force of intellect, a most profound piece of criticism. Then I took her hand, and said : ' You are quite right, I will cut out that scene.'

' You are really delightful,' she exclaimed, throwing her arms round my neck.

' You will own, however,' I said laughing, ' that it is vastly amusing to see me cut the very scene round which my piece was written.'

Nothing is more conducive to mutual confidence and suggestion, than such genuine and heartfelt collaboration between two individuals. The communion of mind leads to the communion of hearts, and as a consequence the discussion that day gradually drifted from the tragedy to the tragedienne herself, from Medea to Mdlle. Rachel. Without the least premeditation she began to talk of her *débuts*, of the hopes she cherished when she was young, of her own life, until at last she confided to me a fact so curious and so much redounding to her honour, that I cannot resist the pleasure of telling it. We had been chatting about Polyeucte and Pauline. ' Ah,' she exclaimed, ' Pauline's is the part I probably liked best, nay, worshipped most in my life.' She laid great stress on the word worshipped.

' The character has produced a strange sensation in me, which perhaps few people would credit. You

ask me what it was? I will tell you. You remember that after having created it with great success, I suddenly relinquished it?' 'I even remember the curious explanation given at the time,' I replied. 'I know what you refer to,' she said laughing. 'They wanted to make out that I was jealous of Beauvallet as Polyeucte. I, jealous of Beauvallet, a very likely thing indeed. The truth is, that I ceased to play Pauline for a while, out of respect for the character. You do not know what a strange creature I am. A fatal accident in my life brought me in contact with a man of low sentiments and ideas, but of powerful intellect, by which he soon gained such mastery over me, that while cursing it I submitted to it.' 'But why did you submit?' 'Why indeed? You men of intellect fancy you are lynx-eyed, and all the while you are simply so many moles when it comes to reading our hearts, the hearts of actresses who happen to be women at the same time. You simply see nothing at all; true, we ourselves often see no more than that. Why did I submit to a man I hated and despised? Because he had a hold on me, because he had got hold of a secret which he used as a weapon against me, because he had persuaded me that he could further my theatrical career. To be frank with you, I am not quite sure that I did not look upon his perverse power over me as a proof of force. And yet, so intensely did I loathe him, that one night in the first act of "Maria Stuart"

I actually put a small pistol in my pocket, with the firm intention of shooting him in the stage-box in which he always showed himself conspicuously whenever I played. What a sensation it would have caused !' Of course I smiled when I heard her utter this bit of theatrical bombast, and she went on : ' I understand, you think I am only acting a bit of comedy before you. Never mind,' she added with strange persistence, ' I wanted you to know this story and I want you to believe it, for it is the plain unvarnished truth. I gave up the part of Pauline so suddenly, because I felt unworthy of playing it, because there came a time when I hated myself so much that I felt I could no longer act so noble a character and utter the lofty sentiments placed on her lips. Those admirable lines burnt my tongue like fire, and I could speak them no longer, I really could not !'

She spoke with such apparent truth, that her words made a profound impression upon me and I became serious. Then she went on in an attitude and voice I shall never forget : ' That all this sounds very improbable, I know full well ; but what would you say if I laid bare my whole heart to you ? You have a great admiration for me, I believe ? You all go into ecstasies when you hear me declaim some great part ? Well, let me tell you, there was once a Rachel within me ten times greater than the one you know. I have not attained the height of fame that might have been mine. I have given proof of some talent, no

doubt, but I might have been a genius. Ah! would that I had been differently brought up, that my surroundings had been different. If I had led a different life, what an artist I should have been. When I think of all this, I am torn by such regrets . . . .’ Here she came to a sudden stop and covered her face with her hands for a minute or two, until I saw tears trickling through her fingers. I was very much astonished and asked myself how much truth there was in what I saw? Were these genuine tears, or had she the gift of producing them at will? Was it her intention to deceive me, or did she deceive herself? Imagination is so important a factor in shaping the actions of those high-strung creatures, that one never knows where the truth begins, and where it ends. What was the cause of her being so deeply moved? Was it regret at a non-realised artistic ideal, or was she merely creating a part as she went on? Did she want to impose upon me?

Mme. Talma has left it on record that her emotion in ‘Iphigénie’ was caused *not* by the lines of Racine but by the sound of her own voice in delivering them. Was Mdlle. Rachel’s a similar instance? Did she feel moved at the sound of her own voice? Had she a particular reason for selecting me as the depositary of her confessions, I who could hardly be termed a friend? I was lost in speculation and expected every moment to see her remove her hands from her face, laugh in mine at the sight of my



emotion and hear her say. 'That was well done, I see I have played my part well—' Nothing of the kind happened. She dried her tears and said quietly, 'Now you know me better than many others who fancy they know me intimately.'

I went away deeply moved, astonished and delighted. This conversation seemed a happy augury to myself. Changeable as I knew her to be, I could hardly imagine that she would not keep faith with a man to whom she had confided so much. The noble character she had assumed before me for a moment would bind her more or less, if only for the pleasure it would afford her to appear in such a light. In short, I felt very hopeful. Three days later, however, I heard that Mdlle. Rachel was about to start for Russia, and thus put an end to the rehearsals of 'Médéc.'

It was a severe shock; a peculiar circumstance made the case more aggravating. There happened to be a vacant chair at the Academy and I had counted on this very 'Médée' as one of my best claims. The departure of Mdlle. Rachel, then, dashed all my hopes to the ground; still I was not disheartened. She wrote to me that her journey would simply delay the production of our piece for three months, and I pretended to believe her. We often confuse faithless folk by pretending to place faith in them. It, as it were, forces their hand. During these three months of waiting, I endeavoured



to discover in that strange character itself the reason of that hope against hope, which might still remain in me. During those three months, I made some profound psychological studies indeed. I fancy the reader will feel some interest in this little voyage of discovery.

### III

Mdlle. Rachel had no doubt an excellent heart. No more affectionate daughter, no more loving sister, no more devoted mother than she. Dependents, inferiors, servants, the 'small fry' of the theatre, simply worshipped her. While in London, I saw her burst into tears on hearing of the death of a young Neapolitan Prince at the age of twenty-three, and she sobbed so violently, that her brother who was at the same time her manager, was afraid it might impair her voice for that night, and with the practical philosophy of the manager told her 'that we are all mortal.' But I also remember having caught her one day in her dressing-room dancing a sort of cancan in the costume of Virginia. 'Oh, Mademoiselle Rachel,' I exclaimed, 'and in that dress too, it really is too horrible.' 'That is just why it is charming, you great ninny,' she retorted, laughing. 'After all, my dear fellow, in my inmost heart I am a little mountebank.' This was true and not true; she was a little mountebank and at the same time she was a Virginia. A tragic actress in virtue of her voice, intelligence

and gait, she was before everything an actress at heart and in her inmost soul. One day, after an aristocratic reception where she had assumed all the airs of a great lady, she felt the need of having her 'fling,' and there and then before some friends indulged in antics and gestures worthy of the veriest guttersnipe. That was the strange, characteristic mark of this multiple being. The incongruous was the acme of her delight. Blended with everything else, and ever floating to the top, there was the temperament of the jeering, flouting street-arab, speaking all kinds of languages and changing her vocabulary according to her interlocutor, delighting most in getting the laugh of folk, and catching them unaware.

Poor M. Viennet had a specimen of this to his cost. M. Viennet was a man of parts and talent; he was loyal to a fault, brusque to a degree that might be mistaken for good-nature, all his defects aggravated, by an amount of self-esteem, which was no doubt justified by his merits; unfortunately his conceit and his merits pulled different ways. He was a very successful, satirical poet, and considered himself a tragic writer of genius. One day, then, he made his appearance in Mdlle. Rachel's dressing-room.

'You probably do not know me, mademoiselle. I am Viennet.'

'Oh, monsieur,' she replied in her most wheedling voice, 'who does not know . . . Viennet?'

'I have been told that you would like to create a new part.'

'I am dying to do so.'

'I have brought you a most admirable part.'

'There is no need to add the superlative.'

'I want no compliments, and have no wish to sell you a pig in a poke. I do not ask you to enact my tragedy, but simply to let me read it to you. True, I am perfectly certain that when you have heard it . . . .'

'And I feel equally sure.'

'Then you are agreeable to my reading it?'

'Am I agreeable, M. Viennet? I am only too pleased. Nay, if you will permit me to say so, too proud that you should have selected so humble an artist as myself to be your interpreter.'

'Very well; when shall it be then? To-morrow?'

'Yes, say to-morrow.'

'At two o'clock?'

'Yes, at two o'clock.'

Thereupon Viennet departs triumphant, but triumphant without surprise, calm, as becomes a man who has simply received the homage due to him.

'She is really very nice and charming this young tragedienne,' he says to everyone he meets. 'A good deal of brain, taste, and tact. She is absolutely bent on playing my Roxane.'

Next day he calls at the appointed hour.

'Madame is not at home.'

He calls again the next day.

‘Madame is not well.’

On the third day he rings the bell in a perfect rage. Her man-servant opens the door.

‘Mademoiselle Rachel?’

‘Will you please step in!’

At last, thinks poor Viennet, as he is being shown into a small drawing-room, where an elegant young man with the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in his buttonhole, is already waiting.

‘Will monsieur give me his card,’ says the man.

‘My name is sufficient—Viennet.’

‘I will go and see if Madame is at home,’ with which the man opens the door of a second room, and our poor poet overhears Mdlle. Rachel saying to the servant :

‘M. Viennet! Tell him that I am sick of him.’

The reader may fancy the fury of our poor poet, especially when the young fellow smiles. ‘You would not think it a laughing matter, monsieur,’ says Viennet, ‘if like myself you had come for the third time.’

‘Oh, M. Viennet,’ interrupts the young fellow, still smiling, ‘that’s a mere nothing compared to what she would do to you if you were her lover.’

The recollection of this incident was not calculated to reassure me. But here is another story which caused me still greater anxiety.

In her very young days Mdlle. Rachel had what might be called her pre-historic period. I am alluding

to the time when the Faubourg St. Germain had taken her under its wings as the high Priestess of art. She was asked to l'Abbaye-aux-Bois, to meet the Archbishop of Paris, so that he might hear her recite. Her spotless fame was like a sacred fire, around which some of the greatest ladies of France kept watch. One of these, by no means the least illustrious or the least clever, wishing to show her respect for the great artist before the world at large, took her in an open carriage in broad daylight for a drive to the Champs-Élysées, her own daughter sitting with her back to the horses. On their return from this drive, Mdlle. Rachel flung herself at the Duchess' feet, exclaiming in a voice broken by emotion and tears: 'Oh Madame, such a proof of esteem from you is more precious to me than all my talent.' The emotion of the actress was fully shared by the Duchess and her daughter, who both asked Rachel to rise, and embraced her. Shortly afterwards, Mdlle. Rachel takes leave. The grand drawing-room led into two smaller ones. Mdlle. Rachel crossed these latter two without having noticed that the Duchess' daughter had accompanied her as a mark of respect and sympathy. When she gets to the last door, Mdlle. Rachel opens it, turns round, and fancying herself quite alone, simply puts her finger to her nose and inflates her cheeks like Gavroche when he wishes to express his contempt for men and things in general.

Unfortunately this last door had panels of looking-



glass which reflected the actress' movement, into the second drawing-room, where the Duchess' daughter was still lingering. She catches sight of Rachel and her expressive pantomime, rushes back to her mother and, choking with indignation, tells her what she has seen. She herself told me the story some time afterwards, and while telling it could scarcely suppress her emotion. I pointed out to her that she took the matter much too seriously, that Mdlle. Rachel was really not so ungrateful as she appeared, that she was neither indifferent to the Duchess' good opinion, nor failed to appreciate her kindness to herself. The matter was simply this, when she reached the door, the small mischievous imp that lives in her brain, popped out of its box and began to jeer at her real feeling.

My philosophical leniency may have merely sprung from the wish to keep up my own courage, but later on this foresaid little imp, when I began to think of him, caused me much uneasiness, and my forebodings proved correct.

On her return from Russia, Mdlle. Rachel told me plainly that she had no intention of ever playing 'Médée.' I was furious and commenced an action against her which I won. She appealed and lost again. She was cast in six thousand francs damages which I divided between the Society of Dramatic Authors and the Society of Authors. I then published my piece, and the rapid sale of several editions en-

abled my friends at the Academy to construe this into a valid claim to the vacant chair. I had my revenge, but it was after all an unsatisfactory one, seeing that the foremost condition of the success of a play is its representation on the stage. I still craved for further reparation, when the luckiest chance of my whole life, perhaps, brought me in contact with a tragic actress of genius, to wit, Adelaide Ristori.

'*Médée*' transformed into '*Medea*' became for that grand interpreter the means of a veritable triumph, in which I had my share. My tragedy, taken by her to every capital in Europe, and even to America, translated successively into Italian, English, German and Dutch, was enacted everywhere except on the stage for which it had been written.

But the most surprising result of my success, was my reconciliation with Mdlle. Rachel. With one of her characteristic, generous impulses, she was the first to applaud my success, instead of being vexed at it. She was thankful to me for having taken up my own cudgels and avenged myself in that manner, even upon her. My step invested me with a certain grandeur in her eyes, and she was the first to hold out the hand of friendship under circumstances I shall never forget. She was at Cannet and dying. Pure chance brought me thither, and I immediately went to see her. I was told that her days were spent in those alternate periods of illusion and sombre clairvoyance which are the invariable symptoms of organic

diseases. 'For six hours a day I am full of hope, during the rest I am plunged in despair,' she kept on saying. Her terrible sufferings now and then became plastically manifest in attitudes replete with statuesque and noble grace, attitudes of which she was perfectly conscious, for your great dramatic artist never forgets his ego even amidst the most cruel bodily and mental suffering. He is actor and spectator in one.\* However real his despair, he watches the rendering of it. Mdlle. Rachel felt that her poses as a young invalid were elegant to a degree; she looked upon herself as a beautiful statue personifying 'Grief.'

As she was too ill to see me when I called, she sent word that she was deeply affected by my visit, and would I call again. When I did return, her sister handed me a letter dictated by her. It was full of affectionate expressions of regard as well as of regret for the past, and ended with the following passage which affected me doubly: both by its proof of her confidence in me, and by the gleam of hope it expressed.

'*A bientôt*, we shall meet again either here or in Paris. You are the author who most truthfully portrays woman's nature. Promise me that you will write me a part for my re-appearance.'

\* Two or three hours before his death, Quin suddenly awoke to consciousness. 'I should like to be conscious to the very last, to see whether I took the correct reading of my character,' he said.—TR.

Three days later, she was dead. Something of her remained behind.

The reader will remember her heartrending sobs at the rehearsal of 'Adrienne,' her fear of dying young, and that sad phrase: 'Soon there will be nothing left of what was once Rachel.'

She was mistaken, however, something does remain of her, the halo round her name!

We link it almost naturally with that of another young and sublime artist, taken away like Rachel, in the prime of life. We speak in the same breath of Rachel and of Malibran.

## CHAPTER VI

A Portrait-Gallery.—Samuel Hahnemann, the Inventor of Homœopathy.  
—How I became acquainted with him.—Hahnemann and his Wife at my little Daughter's Bedside.—A physical Portrait.—His Directions.—'Throw Physic to the Dogs.'—He predicts the Crisis to a Minute.—He saves my Daughter's Life.—The Paris Faculty of Medicine disgusted.—A Doctor à la Molière.—It would have been better that this little girl should have died.—The Origin of Hahnemann's System.—His Language.—His religious Belief.—The Sentence under my Daughter's Portrait.—Madame Hahnemann.—Her History.—Her Faith in her Husband.—Hahnemann's Dietary.—His Death at eighty-three.—Chrétien Urhan.—An ascetic Musician.—His physical Portrait.—How he reconciled his Religion with his Art.—He gets a Dispensation from the Archbishop of Paris to play in the Orchestra of the Opéra.—How he did play.—A Vision and what came of it.—His Visits to my Wife.—A Lesson to a Lady of Title.—His Reverence for the Composer's Idea.—He introduces Schubert to Frenchmen.—Jean-Jacques Ampère.—Jean-Jacques' Father.—Absentmindedness of the Father and Son.—Ampère's personal Belongings.—The Difference between the Father and Son intellectually.

### I

SAMUEL HAHNEMANN was one of the great revolutionaries of the nineteenth century. It was he who towards 1835 began a revolution in medical science which still lasts. I am not discussing the system, I am simply stating the fact.

An accident for which I could not be sufficiently grateful brought me in contact with him at the



moment when his reputation was fast changing into fame. I contributed, perhaps, something to this, and the story of the intimate friendship that sprang up between us may aid the reader in gaining an idea of that extraordinary and superior human being.

My little daughter, then about four years old, lay dying ; our family physician, who was attached to the Hotel-Dieu, Dr R——, had told one of our friends in the morning that her condition was hopeless. Her mother and I were watching perhaps for the last time by her bedside : Schoelcher and Goubaux were with us, and in the room was also a young man in evening dress, who three hours before was a stranger to us. His name was Amaury Duval and he was one of the most promising pupils of M. Ingres.

We had wished to preserve at least a visible remembrance of the dear, little creature we were already bewailing as lost, and Amaury, at the urgent request of Schoelcher\* had left a reception in order to paint that sad portrait. When the dear and charming fellow, who was only twenty-nine then, entered the room, deeply moved by our despair, neither we nor he suspected that a few hours later he should render us the greatest service anyone could render us, and that we should be indebted to him for

\* Victor Schoelcher, already mentioned ; one of the most magnificent types of the honest straightforward, incorruptible Republican. He was on the barricade with Baudin and Esquiros on the 3d December '51, when Baudin was killed.—TR.

more than the image of our daughter, namely, for her life.

He took up his position at the foot of the cot, the light of a lamp which had been placed on a high piece of furniture fell on the face of the child. Her eyes were already closed, the dishevelled hair was falling on her temples, the small face and hands were almost as white as the pillow on which her head reclined, but childhood itself is invested with such charms, that her approaching death seemed to shed an additional grace on her features. Amaury spent the greater part of the night in making his sketch, the poor fellow furtively wiping his eyes now and then, lest his tears should drop on the paper. Towards morning his drawing was finished, and influenced by his own emotion, he had simply drawn a masterpiece. He was just going, accompanied by our affectionate and heartfelt thanks when all of a sudden he stopped. 'Look here,' he said, 'seeing that your doctor has declared the case to be hopeless, why not call to your aid that new system of medicine which is beginning to make so much noise in Paris, why not send for Hahnemann.' 'He is right,' exclaimed Goubaux, 'Hahnemann is my neighbour, he lives in the Rue de Milan, opposite my place. I do not know him, but that will make no difference. I am going to him and will bring him back with me.' When Goubaux got to Hahnemann's there were at least twenty people in the waiting room. The servant explains that he

must wait for his turn. 'Don't talk about waiting,' shouts Goubaux. 'My friend's daughter is dying; the doctor must go back with me immediately.' 'But, monsieur,' protests the servant. 'Yes, I understand, I understand,' says Goubaux, 'I came in last. What does that matter. "The last shall be the first," says the Gospel.' Then turning to those around him, he adds, 'Is it not so, mesdames? Am I not right in supposing that you will give me your turn,' and without waiting for an answer, he makes straight for the doctor's consulting room, opens the door and interrupts a consultation. 'Doctor,' he says to Hahnemann, 'I know I am acting in defiance of all regulations and conventionality, but you must put aside everything and come with me. I want to take you to a little girl of four who will surely die if you do not go to her; you cannot let her die, can you?' And his irresistible fascination produces its usual effect; an hour afterwards Hahnemann and his wife enter the sickroom accompanied by Goubaux.

In spite of all my trouble and grief, in spite of my brain racking with pain for want of sleep, I could not help comparing the man who entered the room to one of the characters from the weird tales of Hoffmann. Short, but well-knitted and walking with a firm step, wrapt in a furcoat from nape to heel and leaning on a thick cane with golden knob, he walked at once to the bedside. He was close upon eighty then, with an admirable head of long and silky hair combed back-

wards and carefully arranged into a roll round the neck; eyes, of a dark blue in the centre with an almost white ring round the pupil, a proud, commanding mouth with protruding lower lip and aquiline nose. After having cast a first look at the child, he asked for particulars of her illness without taking his eyes off her for an instant. Then his cheeks flushed, the veins in his forehead stood out like whipcord and in an angry voice, he exclaimed, 'Fling all those drugs out of the window; every vial and bottle that's there. Take the cot from this room, change the sheets and the pillows and give her as much water as she will drink. They have lighted a furnace in the poor child's body. We must first of all extinguish the fire. After that we'll see.' We timidly objected that this change of temperature and linen might prove very dangerous to her. 'What will prove fatal to her,' was the answer, 'is this atmosphere and the drugs. Carry her into the drawing-room, I'll come back to-night. And above all, give her water, as much water as possible.'

He came back that night, he came back next morning, and began to give her medicines of his own. He expressed no opinion as to the final issue, but merely said each time, 'We have gained another day.' On the tenth day the danger grew all at once imminent. The child's knees had almost become rigid with the chill of death. At eight o'clock at night he made his appearance, and remained for a quarter of an



hour. Apparently he was in a state of intense anxiety, and after having consulted with his wife, who always accompanied him, he handed us some medicine saying, 'Give her this, and be careful to note whether between now and one o'clock her pulse becomes stronger.' At eleven o'clock I was holding my daughter's arm, when I fancied I felt a slight modification in the pulsation. I called my wife, I called Goubaux and Schoelcher. Let the reader picture to himself the four of us, looking at the watch, counting the beats of the pulse, not daring to affirm anything, fearing to rejoice until a few minutes had elapsed, when we absolutely flung ourselves into one another's arms, the pulse had 'gone up.' Towards midnight Chrétien Urhan\* entered the room. After looking at the child, he drew to my side, saying with an air of profound conviction, 'My dear M. Legouvé, your daughter is safe.' 'She is a trifle better,' I answered, scarcely knowing what I said, 'but as for her being out of danger, let alone on the way to recovery . . .' 'I tell you she is safe,' he insisted, then bending over the cot by which I was sitting alone, he kissed her on her forehead and went away.

A week later, the patient was, in fact, on the road to recovery. This cure assumed the importance of an event in Paris, I might almost say that it created a scandal. I was not altogether unknown and people

\* M. Legouvé has given a portrait of Chrétien Urhan which will be found in the following pages.—TR.



freely used the words 'miracle and resurrection.' The whole of the medical faculty showed itself intensely annoyed, poor Dr. R.— was taken to task by all his colleagues; very animated discussions took place both in society and at the Faculty. One physician was not ashamed to say aloud in M. de Jouy's drawing-room: 'I am very sorry this little girl did not die.' The majority of the doctors confined themselves to repeating the parrot cry: 'It's not the quack who has cured her, but nature; he simply benefited by the allopathic treatment left to him by his predecessors. To all of which objections I simply made the same answer I still make: 'What does it matter to me whether he was the cause or the means of saving her? What does it matter to me whether she was saved at his hands or between his hands? Was she as good as dead when he entered my house? Was she cured when he left it? I wish to know no more than that in order to be everlastingly grateful to him. Though I may prove faithless to his doctrine, I will not be faithless to his memory, and to me he will always remain one of the most potential men I ever met.'

The very way in which he conceived his doctrine is in itself a portrait. Was it calculation, self-interest, desire for fame that led to the conception, did he arrive at it by purely scientific research? Not at all. The system sprang from his heart. A physician of the highest rank, numbering among his patients the most powerful and wealthy in Germany, he claimed

one day the co-operation of one of his colleagues for his youngest child. The case was very serious and the most drastic treatment resorted to. All at once, after a terrible night of suffering on the part of the little one, Hahnemann, beside himself with pity and grief, exclaimed: 'No, it is not possible that God should have created those dear and innocent beings for us to inflict such tortures upon. No, a thousand times "No." I will not be the executioner of my children.' And aided by his profound knowledge of chemistry begotten from long study, he rushed as it were in quest of new remedies and built up a complete medical system of which his fatherly affection was virtually the foundation. Such was the man, and as he was then, he had always been. The powerful structure of his face, his square jaws, the almost incessant quiver of his nostrils, the constant twitching of the mouth, the corners of which had dropped from age, everything attested conviction, passion, power. His language was as original as his character and figure. One day I asked him why he always prescribed water even to people in good health. 'What is the use of crutches to people who have got sound legs, and wine is after all no better than crutches.' It is also from his lips that I heard that strange sentence which, taken in its absolute sense, is apt to puzzle one, but which, if properly understood goes to the very foundation of medical science: 'There are no diseases, there are people who are ill.' His religious

faith was as intense as his medical faith. I had two striking proofs of this. One spring day on entering his room, I said : ' Oh, monsieur, what a beautiful day.' ' They are all beautiful days,' he replied in his calm and grave voice. Like Marc-Aurelius he lived in the bosom of a harmonious universe. When my daughter was quite recovered, I showed him the charming drawing of Amaury Duval. He looked for a long while and with intense emotion at the picture of the dear little creature he had snatched, as it were, from the jaws of death, at the little creature, such as he had seen her for the first time when she was on the brink of the grave, then he asked me to give him a pen and he wrote at the bottom :—

' God has blessed her and saved her.

' SAMUEL HAHNEMANN.'

He simply looked upon himself as a minister who countersigns the orders of his master.

His portrait would not be complete without that of his wife. She never left his side. In his consulting-room she sat at a small table close to his desk, working like him and for him. She was present at all his consultations, whatever the sex of the patient, and the subject of the consultation. She took all the symptoms down in writing, gave her advice to her husband in German and prepared all the medicine. She accompanied him in the rare instances of his visiting a patient at his own home. But the most notable fact in connection with herself was that Hahnemann was

the third old man to whom she had linked her existence in that way. She had started with a painter, then passed on to an author and finished up with a doctor.

Here is her history. When between five-and-twenty and thirty Mdlle. d'Hervilly (that was her maiden name), handsome, tall, elegant, with her fresh and youthful face set in a frame of fair curly hair, her small blue eyes as piercing as any black ones, links her fate to that of a celebrated pupil of David. Without marrying the painter, she becomes wedded to his style of painting and might have signed more than one of his canvasses, as later she signed the prescriptions of Hahnemann. When M. L—— died, she turned to poetry, represented in this instance by a poet who was seventy, for as she went, her taste for old men developed. Fired by the communion with the poet, she took to writing short poems with the same ardour she had shown in painting historical pictures, and the poet having departed this life in the course of time, she became somewhat tired of septuagenarians, and married Hahnemann who was eighty. After that she became as great a revolutionary in medical science as she had been a classicist in literature and painting. One day when complaining to her of the dishonesty and want of loyalty of a servant whom we had been obliged to dismiss, she said: 'Why did you not tell me of this before? We have remedies for that kind



of thing.' Let me hasten to add that, notwithstanding this ingenuous remark, she was gifted with a very remarkable intellect, and a touching skill as a sick nurse. No one better than she understood the art of alleviating the patient's suffering by numberless small contrivances. To the pious ardour of a sister of charity she added the ingenious delicacy of a well-bred woman of the world. Her solicitude for Hahnemann was truly admirable. He died as it was fit he should die. Until his eighty-fourth year he was the most eloquent proof of the value of his doctrine. Not a single ailment, not a single lapse of memory or intellect. His way of living was simple, without the slightest affectation of rigorism. He never drank pure water or pure wine. A few spoonfuls of champagne in a decanter of water was his sole beverage, and in the way of bread, he ate every day a small baba.\* 'It's more tender and easy for my old teeth,' he said. In the summer when the evenings were fine, he returned on foot from the Arc de Triomphe, and stopped on his way home at Tortoni's to eat an ice. One morning, on getting up, he felt less well than usual. He took some medicine and said to his wife, 'If this does not act, my case is serious.' Next morning he felt weaker, and twenty-four hours later, he passed away without pain, and recommending his soul to God.

His death affected me greatly, and few men have

\* A kind of sponge cake, sometimes soaked in rum or sherry.—TR.



impressed me with the idea—to the extent he did—of being superior to their fellow-creatures. Then how did I come to abandon his doctrine? Purely from admiration of the man. It requires more than mere confidence to be a follower of homœopathy, it wants faith. The theory of infinitesimal doses is so entirely opposed to commonsense that one must blindly believe in the man to be able to believe in the thing. With the disappearance of Hahnemann my worship fell with the object of my worship, and his successors seemed to me such an immeasurable distance behind him, that gradually—and also owing to a new friendship I had contracted—I returned to the medical creed of my forebears, in which I am likely to die. I owed, nevertheless, this tribute to Hahnemann, and my *ex-voto* will be all the more valuable, seeing that it is offered by an apostate.

## II

During the first years of Louis-Philippe's reign there was seen on the Boulevards every evening about six, a short man, almost bent double, if not absolutely humpbacked, and wrapt in a long light blue coat. His head reclined on his chest, he was apparently lost in deep thought, his eyes were invariably turned towards the ground. His ashen-grey complexion, his long nose, like that of Pascal, his ascetic look which reminded one of a mediæval monk, provoked the question on the part of those who saw him,

‘Who is this man?’ The surprise became greater still if they happened to see this cenobitical-looking individual stop at the angle of the Rue Marivaux and enter the doors of the Café Anglais. But the surprise changed into stupor if in about an another hour they happened to see him emerge from the fashionable restaurant, cross the road in the direction of the Rue Le Peletier, disappear into the ‘artists’ entrance’ to the Académie Nationale de Musique (otherwise the Opéra) and finally take his place among the musicians in the orchestra. Who was he? He was, in fact, a kind of fourteenth century monk, pitchforked by accident into the Paris of the nineteenth century and into the Opéra. His name was Urhan, and his parents, as if foreseeing what he would be, had named him Chrétien (Christian).

Chrétien Urhan had two creeds. His soul was equally divided between faith and music. He never missed going to mass, strictly followed every penance of the Catholic Church, fasted every day until six o’clock, never tasted flesh, making his dinner of fish and milk at the Café Anglais, and played the first violin at the Opéra. What had induced him to occupy a desk there? Assuredly he had not done so without many misgivings and violent struggles with his conscience. His mysticism forbade him to co-operate in the interpretation of works put under the ban of the Church, to be an active performer in that amalgam of temptation and seduction, but on

the other hand, he believed nearly as much in Glück, Mozart and Rossini as in God, and he not only worshipped religious music but dramatic music. To give up listening to and playing 'Orphée,' 'La Vestale,' 'Guillaume Tell,' 'Les Huguenots,' etc., would have driven him to despair. What was he to do? He got out of it by a dispensation and by a compromise. The dispensation was granted to him by the Archbishop of Paris, who could not refrain from smiling when Urhan came to ask him for permission to play the violin at the Opéra. The compromise was simply a matter between himself and his conscience. He promised himself to play with his back turned to the stage and he kept his pledge. The temptation of the eye was, at any rate, avoided in that way. He never allowed himself to glance at an artist, at a piece of scenery or a costume. The thing answered more or less in the concerted pieces when the whole of the orchestra was playing, but Urhan was first violin (leader), as such he alone accompanied certain *pas* of the ballet. These *pas* are as it were duos between the instrumentalist and the ballerina; in a duo the executants should look at one another; their looks are the only means of communion. Urhan did not trouble himself about that. At the beginning of the piece he took up his instrument as one takes up one's 'beads,' and with his eyes closed he played the air of the ballet, conscientiously, religiously and with a great deal of expression, but without the least concern

for the ballerina. If she danced out of time, so much the worse for her. I verily believe that if she had slipped, Urhan would have gone on till the end as if nothing had happened.

Every one of his actions was stamped with the same originality. I have often been in the room when he called on my wife, whom he liked very much. He would sit down by the fire, remain for a quarter of an hour without uttering a word, then rise and say : 'Good-bye, dear Madame Legouv  , I felt the need of seeing you.' One of his oldest friends, a lady to whom he was in the habit of writing very often, has shown me a letter of his in which the ordinary lines are suddenly replaced by a bar of music, after which he adds : 'Words failed to convey my idea, so I thought I had better tell you what I wanted in music.' Finally, he came to tell me one day how, while strolling in the Bois de Boulogne, he had heard a voice saying to him, 'Write this,' and how that voice had there and then sung an air to him, how he 'noted the air' from that voice's dictation. Then handing me a sheet of music, he added : 'Here is the piece, but seeing that it is not of my composing, I'll not assume the credit of it, and will call it "Transcription."' And that, in fact, was the title under which it appeared with a short explanatory preface to it. The oddest part of the whole business though, was his constant entreaty to me to write an article for some paper on this melody. 'But above all,' he said, 'do not neglect



to point out its origin.' I felt in an awkward position. On the one hand, I did not wish to refuse him, lest I should vex him ; I did not wish to ridicule his version of the affair, lest I should hurt his feelings ; I did not wish to appear to believe in it, lest I should make myself look ridiculous. After cudgelling my brain for awhile, I managed to satisfy him and got out of the difficulty with flying colours. But only one Journal consented to print my miraculous story—*La Gazette de France*.

As a rule such eccentricities lend to laughter, but no one ever dreamt of laughing at Urhan. Few men of his time enjoyed greater consideration. The sincerity of his faith, the austerity of his life, his ardent charity (he gave away all he earned) commanded the respect and admiration of everyone. People instinctively felt that he was what they honour most and justly, a sterling individuality. His dignity as an artist had become proverbial. This dignity did not only spring from his self-respect, but from a reverence for his art. I can quote a striking proof of it. The Marquis de Prault, a very intelligent amateur of music, had organised a series of *matinées* of chamber music at his mansion in the Faubourg St Honoré and had confided their direction to Urhan, who at the same time played the first violin. On one occasion a young duchess (the Marquis' *matinées* had become the fashion, society was delighted to air its real or assumed appreciation of high-class music), a



young duchess, elegant and handsome, enters the room in the middle of a piece, and after causing the little flutter of excitement she was probably bent upon causing by her late arrival, sits down and engages in small talk with the lady next to her. Urhan gives a sharp rap on his desk, stops the quartet, puts his bow under his arm, looks vaguely around him until the noise has ceased and when silence reigns once more gravely recommences the piece *da capo*. I pledge you my word that from that day forward no one ever made a noise at the matinées of the Marquis de Prault. At the termination of the performance I went up to him and congratulated him on what he had done. 'I will never allow anyone to show a want of respect in my presence, to a masterpiece,' he replied calmly. He had not felt hurt on his own account, but on that of Beethoven.

As a virtuoso, Urhan only occupied a secondary rank. There were a dozen more skilful violinists than he in Paris, but he made up for his relative inferiority as an executant by a gift as rare as it is precious, he had an individual style. Urhan's style was due to his profound knowledge of all the great masters, also to his religious and unbending respect for their works. He would no more permit any attempt at altering their character in their execution, than he would permit a noise during their performance. Habeneck himself often had a hard tussle with him on the subject, especially in the organisation of the

concerts of the Conservatoire in which he (Urhan) had proved himself one of the foremost and most useful of auxiliaries. Any attempt of Habeneck to curtail words or to suppress a few instruments in the rendering of a symphony met with the most determined protest and opposition from Urhan, and on one occasion when the double bass parts had been eliminated from the Choral Symphony, Urhan drew attention to the sacrilege in an article and signed it.

Urhan had a still more individual merit. As a rule the admirers of the past have a contempt for the present. Their admiration of the old masters becomes complicated in virtue of their contempt for the new. Their cult is a jealous, narrow, exclusive cult. They build for themselves a kind of small Olympus whence they do not emerge, and the entrance to which they strenuously defend. Urhan's love of the old masters was only equalled by his passionate admiration for the masters of our time, and even of those of 'to-morrow.' Urhan was as it were a musical sleuth-hound, and he also brought the apostle's zeal to bear upon this. It was he who introduced Schubert to Frenchmen. Schubert is somewhat shelved to-day, nevertheless, he caused a musical revolution among us. He showed us that one might and could write masterpieces of one page. To a certain extent, and from a particular point of view, one might call him the La Fontaine of music, because he crams as much science, as much art, as much pathos and as much

thought into a few bars as La Fontaine did into a few verses. Before Schubert, the great dramatic composers, Mozart, Glück, Rossini, Auber, Hérold, Halévy and others considered it incompatible with their art to write short compositions, the writing of which they left to the composers of songs. Schubert has killed the 'romance' and created the 'melody,' in which branch of musical art Weber, Gounod, Massenet, Delibes, Paladilhe have since then 'created' a whole series of short but delightful masterpieces.

Well, it was Urhan who introduced the first *lied* of Schubert to Frenchmen; it was Urhan who, with matchless energy and perseverance, found a translator, a publisher, and finally a public for him. Finally, and as a finishing touch to this portrait, when Liszt conceived the idea of organising the concerts at the Salle Erhard (Erard), in order to secure as brilliant an execution for the sonatas, duos and trios of Beethoven as had been given to symphonies, he selected Batta as his 'cellist, and Urhan as his violinist. We shall not meet with the like of Urhan as a musician again. He belonged to the race of mystical artists of the Middle Ages. Whenever I watched him caressing his instrument at the Opéra, I felt like looking at a picture of Frà Beato Angelico painting in his cell. One might well apply to him the much-abused term, 'the heaven of art,' because to him art and heaven meant the self-same thing.

## III

I met Jean-Jacques Ampère for the first time while I was a candidate for a vacant chair at the Académie-Française. At seven o'clock when we sat down, quite by accident, next to one another at the hospitable board of the Comte de Belle-Isle, one of the most delightful dilettante I have known, we were strangers ; at nine o'clock, there had sprung up a bond between us. We had, at any rate, one point in common, he was the son of a man of genius; I was the son of a man of talent, and we had both been brought up in the worship of our respective fathers, and with the happy burden of an honourable name to sustain. In addition to this, my multifarious tastes responded to his multifarious gifts. From the first moment I felt amazed at the fertility and spontaneity of that imagination. Since then, I have known him most intimately ; I was sincerely attached to him, and in order to define his character accurately I have been compelled to invoke the names of the most brilliant and illustrious in legend and history—preserving, of course, all due proportion in my comparisons. One thing is, however, certain : the most insatiable conquerors never pursued their conquests with the feverish passion of J. J. Ampère in quest of a masterpiece, a monument or a discovery\* What was his specialty ?

\* Jean-Jacques Ampère, the son of the eminent savant J. C. Ampère whose name is best known in connection with the first experiments in electric telegraphy in France. Jean-Jacques' is familiar to all students of French literature.—TR.



Well, his specialty was everything. Poetry, the drama, archæology, history, criticism, everything attracted him, and nothing seemed sufficient. After the dead languages, the modern; after the modern, hieroglyphics, after the study of books, the study of countries, after the study of countries, the study of men. At twenty he went to live for three months near Goethe in order to gain an accurate knowledge of the high-priest of contemporary poetry. He was not a traveller, simply an inhabitant of every country on the face of the earth. He was just as much at home in Rome, in London, in Heidelberg as in Paris. Added to this, a thorough man of the world and conversant with the usages of the best society everywhere, for he had been welcomed in every intellectual and artistic set in Europe. He knew all their under-currents, all the little foibles and hobbies of the men and women of which these sets were composed. This familiar knowledge, together with his immense and universal scholarship made him the most extraordinary *causeur*, I have ever met with. From one end of Europe to the other, people said 'the charming Ampère.'

That adjective greatly annoyed M. de Rémusat to whom it was also frequently applied. He was right: the word implies something superficial, artificial, worldly, which no more suffices to paint the character of Ampère than that of the author of 'Abélard.' Ampère's soul was to the full as richly endowed as



his mind. The generosity of his feelings was only equalled by the tenderness of his affection. But he could be contemptuously indignant as well. An ardent advocate of liberty like his master and friend M. de Tocqueville, the Coup d'État drove him to a state of veritable fury. For thirteen long years he never ceased to launch his invectives—both written and spoken, in prose as in verse, against the new empire, and more than once he was within an ace of being seriously compromised. Two love-passions equally odd, filled the whole of his existence. At twenty he fell madly in love with a woman of forty ; at sixty he conceived an ardent affection for a girl of twenty. Both passions were the more durable inasmuch as neither was shared, and only ceased with the death of the object of it. Odd to relate, for everything in connection with him is odd, that heart, always in bondage was the companion of a character stubbornly and savagely independent. The slightest restraint was odious to him, he would be slave to nothing. He never had a home, he rented a room, no matter where, by the month or by the day as fancy dictated. He never bought any furniture ; all his earthly possessions in that way consisted of a trunk—if that can be called furniture—in which he stored his manuscripts, books, toilet requisites and clothes. The latter, to tell the truth, did not take up much room. He never had more than one coat ; when it was worn out, a fact of which he himself was never conscious, a

lady of his acquaintance replaced it by another, of which substitution he was equally unconscious. I said just now that he would be slave to nothing: I was mistaken. He was slave to his manuscripts. One day when we were both going to Gurcy, the country seat of Mme. de Haussonville, he came to the station, wearing round his waist a belt, to which was attached a bag containing his papers and to which he seemed to be rivetted, looking not unlike a convict. He could not help laughing at himself.

Those precautions sprang from his fear of his own forgetfulness and absent-mindedness, and the apprehension was not unfounded. He was the true son of his father, whose absent-mindedness had become legendary with the pupils of the *École Polytechnique* and the instances of which were handed down from generation to generation. M. Ampère wiping his face with the cloth intended to wipe the black board, and turning to his pupils with his face a mass of chalk; M. Ampère beginning to work out a problem on the back of a cab which happened to be standing still at the moment and running after his diagrams when the vehicle started; M. Ampère leaving his little girl for a whole day in a waiting-room; M. Ampère entering his drawing-room in full dress, previous to going to the Academy, coat, waistcoat, cocked hat, sword, in short, everything save the most indispensable article of attire. Well, his son was worthy of him. One day at Mme. C——'s where he spent the last years of his

life, surrounded by watchful care for his every comfort, he entered the dining-room in a distracted state, just as they were sitting down to table. 'I can't make it out,' he said, 'I don't know what I have done with the key of my room. I have looked for it everywhere and cannot find it.'—'Ask the servant.'—'I have asked; he has not got it.'—'Where can you have left it?'—'That's what I can't make out. I have looked everywhere, in the drawers, in the wardrobe, in my little cupboard, I can't find it anywhere.'—'Did you say you had looked in the chest of drawers?' asked the sprightly hostess.—'Yes.'—'In the chest of drawers in your room?'—'Yes.'—'Then you did get into your room.'—'Of course I got into my room, seeing that I am telling you that I looked everywhere.'—'But how did you get into your room?'—'Parbleau, with my . . . True,' he exclaimed, 'I got in with my key. That is really too funny, it must have been in the lock, and it is there still.'—There is no need to describe the laughter which hailed the last words.

Unlike his father, his absent-mindedness never interfered with his affections, which neither distance, time, nor place, could diminish, let alone efface. One day while at Rome, near the first woman he worshipped—I am alluding to Mme. Récamier—a letter reaches him from his father, claiming his immediate return to Lyons, where the elder Ampère happened to be at that time, a letter couched in the most affectionate terms. He tears himself away from the

woman he loves, and arrives in Lyons, his heart almost breaking. He is welcomed with open arms, next morning at breakfast his father takes his seat, evidently lost in thought and without uttering a word. Suddenly he looks up and says, 'Jean-Jacques,' (he had named his son Jean-Jacques in remembrance of Rousseau), 'Jean-Jacques, it is very odd, but I fancied that the sight of you would give me greater joy than it has done.'

Those very comical and artlessly cruel words would never have been uttered by the Ampère with whom I am dealing.

In fact, no two men could have been more like and at the same time more unlike than that father and that son. Those two superior intellects had two characteristics in common, fertility of invention and the faculty of initiative. But the moment they are at work, the bifurcation commences. While the father, confining himself strictly to science, evolves from his concentration on one point two or three immortal discoveries, the son like a river which has broken its dams, expands his genius over a hundred different works. Are we to regret this? No. In circumscribing his sphere of action he might, perhaps, have produced a more enduring work, but he would not have been himself, namely, that multiple being, charged with electricity and emitting sparks at every shock. His works are merely 'vanguard' works. His '*Histoire de la Littérature au Treizième Siècle*,' his

‘*Histoire Romaine à Rome*,’ his archæological studies are more or less forgotten, because there have been so many imitations of them. The domain of thought is like America, there are two classes of labourers there, the pioneers who make their way into the backwoods, clear the land, carry light and life where there was nought but solitude before them, and the architects, the builders who raise houses and monuments and virtually efface the trace of the labours that served as the foundations of theirs. Ampère was a pioneer. He was more than that. He deserved a better title, which was given to him finally by a very eloquent voice. On the day of his funeral, the scholarly and brilliant M. Hauréau suddenly felt some one grasp his arm. It was a man of about forty, who in a tone of deep, intense conviction said to him, ‘Monsieur, he whom we have just consigned to his last resting-place was a great citizen.’ The man who spoke thus was Montalembert.



## CHAPTER VII

The Portrait-Gallery continued.—Two Dramatic Counsellors.—What constitutes a Dramatic Counsellor?—Germain Delavigne.—A Trio of Sucking Playwrights.—Scribe and the two Delavignes at work.—Their Thursday's Dinners.—An Exchange of Subjects.—A Witticism of Louis Philippe.—M. Mahéroult.—Dramatic Counsellor and Art Collector.—M. Mahéroult's one Client.—M. Mahéroult's Father.—The Origin of the Comédie-Française of To-day.—The Actors of the old Comédie-Française during the Reign of Terror.—The Difficulties of constituting the Comédie-Française.—Council's Opinion.—The Way it is Received.—Virgil's Timidity.—A French Counterpart of Sir Fretful Plagiary.—Scribe's Way of accepting Advice.—An Anecdote of Gouvion Saint-Cyr.—How the Abbé was introduced into 'Adrienne Lecouvreur.'—Mahéroult's Passion for the Drama.—Mahéroult as an Art Collector.—The Sale of his Collection.—'If after Death the Shades can feel.'

### I

OF all the productions of the brain, dramatic works are the most susceptible of improvement by suggestions from the outside. And yet young authors are often told not to depend upon the advice of others. 'Above all, try to be yourself,' repeats the would-be critic. 'Avoid your originality, your individuality being tampered with.' To all of which I reply by pointing to Molière who not only consulted his servant, but the Prince de Condé besides. When

the first three acts of 'Tartuffe' were finished, Molière read them to the Prince. 'Your piece wants an additional scene, Molière.'—'What kind of one, Prince?'—'People will be sure to accuse you of scoffing at religion, anticipate their criticism by marking the difference between real and sham piety.' Result: the admirable lines, beginning with—

'Il est de faux dévots ainsi que de faux braves.'

It seems to me that what has been useful to Molière cannot be altogether useless to others. Besides, there are facts, which in themselves settle the question. In the poem, the novel, the historical or moral work the author appeals directly to the reader. When he has written 'The End' at the bottom of his manuscript his work is virtually finished. When the playwright has penned the same word he is only half-way. A book is a self-dependent work, not so a play. It has virtually two births: at the first, the author may lay claim to the 'sole paternity,' but at the second, when it leaves the swaddling clothes of manuscript to make its appearance on the stage, the intermediaries between it and the public are numberless. The licenser of plays and his readers, the managers, the actors, the spectators at the dress rehearsals are so many counsellors with whom the author discusses, against whom he defends, at whose suggestions he demolishes, certain parts and reconstructs other parts of his work. We have but

to ask the most skilful playwrights and they will tell us how much they owe to advice from the outside.

Unfortunately the efficient dramatic adviser is rare indeed. Neither natural brilliancy, nor a cultivated intellect is sufficient to fit him for the post. I have known men of sterling intellectual merit, remarkable writers whose opinion on a book was equivalent to a verdict and who at the hearing of a piece emitted opinions altogether valueless. On the other hand, I have known men of the world with little or no knowledge of literature whose impressions of a play were infallible as a test of its worth with regard to the public. And why? Because the judgment of a play requires before everything, a great deal of intuition, instinct, I might say, the gift of divination. When a piece is read to you, you have not to appreciate it as it is, but as it will be. The stage will altogether transform it, hence in listening to it, your mind's eye must see it beforehand as it will be on the stage, you must foresee or guess what that perspective of the stage is likely to add to or take away from it; you must, by a kind of foreknowledge, enter into the prejudices, take count of the susceptibilities of that highly strung and many-sided collective being we call the public. This or that phrase which passes unnoticed before three or four listeners, assumes, all at once, in a large play-house, enormous proportions. In some cases, success is a matter of latitude; a play that succeeds in one quarter may be a failure in

another. This should certainly be considered. Then there is the interpretation, the surrounding circumstances, and the fickleness in judgment. Hoffmann, the erstwhile and clever writer of the *Journal des Débats* meets a friend a few hours before the first performance of his play; 'Les Rendez-vous Bourgeois.' 'I want you to come with me to-night to see a piece which will be hissed . . . three hundred times in succession.' The true dramatic counsellor detects even the possible success behind the initial failure.

It has been my good fortune to know two such eminent dramatic counsellors. The first bears a name rendered illustrious by someone else, but to the lustre of which he has largely contributed: I am alluding to Germain Delavigne.

Truly an amiable and original character if ever there was one, this Germain Delavigne. He has put his name to a great many comedies, in none did his name figure by itself on the title page. He was incapable of writing a piece without a collaborateur, not because his intellect was barren, for I have rarely known a more fertile, a more subtle, a more versatile, but because his dearly prized indolence prevented him from accomplishing by himself the hard travail of bringing forth a dramatic child. No one was less like the lark of La Fontaine.—

'Elle bâtit un nid, pond, couve et fait éclore  
A la hâte; le tout alla du mieux qu'il put.'

He did not mind building a nest, provided someone

else would put the egg into it. He did not mind laying the egg, provided someone else would incubate it. He did not mind incubating it provided someone would hatch. But above all, no hurry-scurry. He was utterly incapable of hurrying over anything. His imagination was not the hoyden, skipping and hopping about ; it was the demure little fairy, quietly active, doing a great deal of business with very little noise.

His brother and he had been schoolfellows of Scribe. As soon as they were emancipated from bondage, they met every Thursday, and when the dessert was on the table, communicated to one another their plans with regard to work. Casimir submitted the sketch of a tragedy, Scribe the idea of a vaudeville, Germain submitted nothing at all. He simply brought to the common fund his exquisite taste and his inventive faculties, which he applied in modifying and improving the work of the other two. With his kindly, ruddy and placid face, his bright and clever smile, he enacted the part Chappelle filled at the suppers at Auteuil, or rather between his two over-active companions, always 'pregnant with something,' he enacted, as it were, the deputy-father, suggesting an idea to the one in want of an idea, an epigram to the other who asked for an epigram, a bit of advice when there was need of a bit of advice ; in short, he placed at their disposal the fruit of his vast reading. 'I am going to look through Germain,' said Casimir,



when in want of a piece of historical, anecdotal or artistic information, and the living book immediately replied, falling open of its own accord at the exact place wanted. The contrast in the character of the three companions was shown in their habits when at work. Casimir Delavigne worked marching up and down the room, Scribe never left his chair, Germain never left his couch. He had scarcely got out of bed when he lay down again on the sofa. He spent his existence on his back like an Oriental, only, instead of smoking he took snuff, and instead of dreaming, he read.

The following trifling fact shows this dramatic counsellor at work. Scribe brings him 'Geneviève, ou la Jalousie paternelle.' The reader may be aware that the piece deals with a father who shows every suitor for his daughter's hand the door, because he cannot make up his mind to part with her. When Scribe has finished reading his piece, Germain says : 'Your piece is an impossibility. Your father is a downright egotist who sacrifices everything to himself. As for loving his daughter, he does not love her a bit.'

Scribe takes his piece home with him and at their next meeting reads his comedy which he has altered and corrected. 'This time,' Germain exclaims, 'you have made your father more impossible still ; he is too fond of his daughter.' A profound remark whence sprang the third and last form of that little

masterpiece of delicate portraiture entitled 'Geneviève.'

The Thursday dinners were not only devoted to consultation, there was an exchange of subjects, a borrowing and lending of *dénouements*. One day Casimir makes his appearance in a state of great consternation, he is at an utter loss for the *dénouement* of the fifth act of 'l'École de Vieillards,' the final situation persistently eludes his grasp.

'One moment,' says Scribe, 'I am just putting the last touches to a vaudeville, entitled, "Michel and Christine," and have hit upon an ingenious device for settling matters satisfactorily, the device would suit your piece admirably, you may have it and welcome.' 'And what will you do?' 'I'll keep it just the same.' 'And what about the public?' 'The public, the public will not find it out. No one will suspect for one moment that the *dénouement* of a little, one-act piece and that of a grand five-act comedy in verse can be the self-same thing. You may take it without fear, just as I will keep it without remorse.' Scribe's prediction proved correct, not a single critic noticed the likeness, but, of course, the *dénouement* of the vaudeville appeared charming, while that of the comedy seemed weak. A thin thread suffices to tie a short act together, it must be untied with a deft and light hand, but a grand work requires more force and vigour in its solution than in its conception.

Those kindly exchanges gave rise to another very

curious incident. Casimir was turning over in his mind a lively, amusing, spirited subject for a two-act comedy ; it was to be founded on a diplomatic misunderstanding ; a young fellow who has been sent to a small State in Germany in search of a particular costume for a ball is mistaken for an important diplomatic envoy. On the same day that Casimir had made up his mind to work out this plot, Scribe and Germain appear at the weekly meeting with a plot with which they profess themselves delighted ; the story of a young princess of eighteen who with all her grace, coquetry, *finesse* and ignorance has, moreover, a secret affection which sets her heart aglow, and is all of a sudden thrown amidst the intrigues of a small court. She steers her course among the suitors for her royal hand with as much skill as, and a good deal more sprightly gaiety than, Penelope herself. Both plots meet with the same enthusiastic reception, and the three companions part from one another with the applause awaiting the two pieces already ringing in their ears. A few days elapse when one fine morning Scribe gets the following letter from Casimir :

‘My dear friend, I cannot get your princess out of my head. I am positively in love with her. I want you to give her to me. My diplomatist seemed to please you. Take him. Let us make an exchange.’ ‘Very well,’ says Scribe, ‘let us make an exchange.’ And the transaction resulted in the idea of Casimir developing into ‘Le Diplomate,’ and that of Scribe

and Germain, being embodied in 'La Princesse Aurélie'; that is, Casimir had bartered a success for a failure. On which fact Scribe commented by saying: 'Germain and I would have had the same success with "La Princesse Aurélie" as we had with "Le Diplomate," for we would have made a two-act comedy out of it and not a five-act. Furthermore, we would have written it in prose and not in verse. It is the verses that ruined Casimir. He writes them too well and they are too pretty; the material was too thin to stand the embroidery and the coat cracked. That is the result of being a poet.' Then he added, laughing: 'That kind of thing could never happen to me.'

A final trait to the picture of that friendly and brilliant trio. In the days when they had not made a name for themselves, the three companions often went to the Théâtre-Français to wind up their evening. 'Ah,' they said, 'if we could only get a hearing on that stage.' A few years afterwards, they still dined together and went to finish up their evening at the Théâtre-Français, where on one of those occasions they were playing 'L'École des Vieillards,' and 'Valérie.' Germain Delavigne's name was not on the bill, but his spirit and epigram pervaded both pieces. He always remained the prime consulting minister of Scribe, even after the Thursday dinners ceased, for there came a time when they did cease, in fact they ceased on the day when the two Delavignes

got married. I advisedly say the day, for they both got married on the same day which circumstance elicited a clever *mot* from Louis-Philippe. The brothers went to apprise him of the impending change in their condition. 'We are both going to get married on Thursday, sire.' 'Indeed, and at the the same hour?' 'Yes, sire.' 'And in the same church?' 'Yes, sire.' 'And to the same woman?'

## II

Our second dramatic counsellor also deserves a place among the cabinet pictures of the nineteenth century.

On the 5th June 1879, there died in Paris at the age of eighty-four a gentleman of whose 'life' and death the public were made aware at the same time by some short obituary notices in the papers. His name was M. Mahérault.

Who and what was M. Mahérault? An unknown man who deserves to be known for three different reasons. He was in turns and at the same time an eminent administrator, a very valuable dramatic counsellor and a noted art connoisseur and collector. Having entered the Ministry for War when very young, he rose gradually to the most important positions, solely in virtue of the services he rendered. The Duc d'Orléans, struck by his high administrative capacities and his views on military reform said one



day, 'Monsieur Mahérault, you shall be my Minister for War.'

The death of the Duc made an end of those brilliant expectations ; at the advent of the Second Republic, he was at the head of a department and was promoted to the post of secretary-general, on which occasion Scribe wrote him the following charming letter :—

'MY DEAR SECRETARY-GENERAL,—Long live the Republic and your wife and mine, and Lisbeth and the whole of your family which is virtually ours. We furthermore beg to thank the actual government for discharging the debts of the Monarchy.—Yours under all reigns,—' E. SCRIBE.'

In 1851, General de Saint-Arnaud wished to include him in the reorganisation of the Council of State, on the sole condition that he should attend the reception of the Prince-President that night at the Elysée. Mahérault simply replied : 'If I possess no other claims to the promotion, that visit will not provide me with any ; if on the other hand, as I believe, I have some claims, the visit is useless, and the condition offensive ; I will not go to the Elysée.' He kept his word, and was not appointed. Such was the man in his public capacity.

As for his second rôle, that of dramatic counsellor, he only enacted it for the benefit of one author, but he enacted it with a vengeance. It is no exaggera-

tion to say that the maintenance and increase of Scribe's glory had become a profession with Mahérault. Each morning, however pressing his administrative business, he called on Scribe on his way to the Ministry, and as a matter of course, found the playwright at work. The visit often lasted only a few minutes, just long enough to go in, to say 'How do you do,' to cast his eyes over the half-finished page on the writing table, to sniff the air of that study, and to inquire if things were going all right, whether there was not some matter with this or that manager in which he, Mahérault, could be of use, and to go out again. More often than not, Scribe did not stop his work, did not get off his chair, but, his eyes fixed on his paper, went on writing, merely saying: 'Oh, it's you; how are you? How is your wife?' The scene meanwhile, was proceeding apace. But every now and then, Scribe put down his pen, saying: 'You are the very man I want; you remember the situation that puzzled me yesterday. I think I've made it all right. Just listen to it.' Then when he had finished reading: 'Well, what do you think of it?' If Mahérault happened to say, 'I don't think you have got hold of it; I am not altogether satisfied, and I'll tell you why;' Scribe invariably replied in his quietest manner: 'Very well, you had better go now, I'll just see who is right, you or I, and I'll read you to-night what I have done.' In what way had Mahérault become entitled to this confidence? By

his affection for Scribe, no doubt, but more so by his education, or rather by his being the son of his father.

If the Comédie-Française wishes to show its gratitude, nay, to discharge a debt, it ought to place in its crushroom and in a prominent—the most prominent spot, the bust of the elder Mahéault; but for him there would be no Comédie-Française to-day. The year 1793 had suppressed the Comédie-Française under circumstances which graphically depict the period itself. At the eighth performance of ‘Paméla’ (adapted from Richardson’s novel) by François de Neufchâteau, the following two lines were frantically applauded—

‘Ah ! les persecuteurs sont les seuls condamnables,  
Et les plus tolérants sont les plus raisonnables.’

For the sake of the period itself, I sincerely trust that the applause was not due to the supposed literary merit of these lines, but be this as it may, ‘a patriot in uniform,’ says *Le Salut Public*, rose from his seat in the balcony, and shouted in an indignant voice: ‘No political tolerance! Political tolerance is a crime.’ The famous actor Fleury replies to the interpellation and the public applauds still more frantically. The patriot in uniform is hooted out of the place, and next day there comes an order from the Committee of Public Safety to close the Theatre and take the actors to prison. Mme. Roland relates in her ‘Mémoires’ that one evening she was startled by

the sound of loud laughter and song proceeding from the passages of the prison, on inquiry she found that the comedians of the Théâtre-Français had arrived, they were accused of preaching moderation, of a want of civic zeal, nay, of conspiring in favour of royalty, by having performed a play of reactionary tendencies. They took their incarceration in such a cheerful spirit that one of them said, 'How well we did play to-night. I suppose it was the threat hanging over us that spurred us on. We simply showed our accusers that we did not care a snap of the fingers for them. We'll perhaps be guillotined, but never mind, it was a capital performance.' I have got an idea that it is only French artists who could make that kind of thing a pretext for playing with greater spirit and brilliancy. When the Reign of Terror was at an end, the Directory established, and François de Neufchâteau had become a minister, his great anxiety was to reconstruct the Théâtre-Français. It was the least he could do for it. Unfortunately the Théâtre-Français was by then a name and nothing more. Overthrown by the Revolution, it had split up into three inferior theatres, three companies under the direction of three enterprising managers, all three of whom were fast going to ruin.

One bankruptcy followed hard upon another—nothing therefore seemed easier than to effect a reconciliation between those members who had been



united so long and who while separated were suffering dearly for that separation. Seemed ; in reality nothing was more difficult than to bring about that juncture. There were obstacles of all kinds ; material obstacles ; several of the older and not a few of the most eminent members having gone to the provinces and even to foreign countries. Then there were political obstacles ; the most ardent party-feeling divided many ; there were the republicans on the one hand, the royalists on the other, and all were equally irreconcilable and fanatically incensed against their opponents. The charming Mdle. Contat, whom the dearest reminiscences bound to the monarchy, exclaimed : ' I would prefer being guillotined not only with regard to my head, but from head to foot rather than appear on the same boards with that horrible Jacobin of a Dugazon.' Added to this there was the vexed question of professional vanity. More than one of those actors on joining a second-rate company had become a leader, nay a star. The non-commissioned officers had become captains, and the captains colonels. True, we have seen in our days a French marshal redescend by his own will to the simple rank of a general of division in the very army of which but the day before he had been the chief, but in the army of actors such abnegation of self is unknown. An understudy who has happened to become the leading man in his own line consent to become an understudy once more, a star consenting



voluntarily to re-enter the group of *nebulæ*? Perish the thought! There was, finally, the question of pounds, shillings, and pence, the salaries were most uncertain, but considerably larger in the case of temporary engagements; this or that leading actor had only signed with the *impresario* with a solid guarantee for the whole of his money, in that way the concern might go 'smash' but the actor himself was safe. The difficulty, therefore, was to remove those many obstacles, to satisfy conflicting claims, to silence rival passions, to conciliate opposing interests. To do this required little short of a miracle, and the miracle was accomplished by the elder Mahéault. Francis de Neufchâteau gave him plenary powers and in fact, put the whole of the burden of the work on him, Mahéault put his heart and soul in the business. 'You are undertaking an impossible task,' said Saint-Prix, the actor to him; 'you do not know the race you are dealing with, they will kill you with pin-pricks.' 'They may if they like,' replied Mahéault, 'meanwhile I'll put fresh life into them. I want the Comédie-Française to become a national institution, I wish the artists to have a home of their own and the home to be called "The House of Molière, Corneille, and Racine."' He proved as good as his word.

On the 11th Priarial of the year VII of the First Republic (30th May 1799) the walls of Paris displayed the following bill, 'Re-opening of the Théâtre-Français. "Le Cid" and "L'École des Maris."' The sight of that

poster repaid M. Mahéroult for all his trouble ; he never would take any other reward.

Brought up by such a father, there is no need to say much about the education of the son. The passion for the theatre was in his blood. He was barely two years old when taken to the playhouse for the first time, Marie-Joseph Chénier (the dramatic author) was his godfather and Mme. Vestris (his god-mother). He got as much schooling at the wings of the Comédie-Française as at the Collège de Navarre. He lived and grew up between Talma, Fleury, Molé and Mdlle. Contat, and for twelve years every success at the Comédie-Française found an echo as it were in the brain of that lad. In his case the doctrine of predestination does not admit of a moment's discussion, nature meant him to be a dramatic adviser. The most characteristic trait in connection with this function is that he brought both his taste as a dilettante and his methodical spirit as an administrator to bear upon it.

Mahéroult was the very opposite of Germain Delavigne. The latter never put his advice in writing. Brevity was the distinctive mark of his judgments, such conciseness suited his indolent temperament, and his critical subtleness scarcely required more than a phrase to express its view. Mahéroult required much more than a single hearing to form an opinion, nor was it expressed in a single line.

No one knew this better than Scribe, and when he

had finished and read his piece to him, he simply handed it over to him, after which Mahérault began to state his real advice, his advice, pen in hand.

I have before me a file of papers, labelled, 'My Remarks on Scribe's pieces, before their performance.' These 'remarks' are nothing less than so many analyses of ten, twelve pages each, I have seen some of twenty-five pages.

Mahérault analyses the work act by act, scene by scene, character by character, almost line for line. Not a single contradiction escapes his vigilant eye, not an error but what he points it out ; I say 'points it out,' I might say pursues, for he brings the implacable honesty of the conscientious head of a department to bear upon his functions. His sincerity often trenches upon harshness, as for instance : 'These verses are deplorably weak, they contain neither an epigram nor an original thought. The bad prose they are intended to replace was far better.' We are confronted with the bluff, not to say rough, honesty of intercourse which Montaigne claimed from genuine friendship. I greatly honour Mahérault for that sincerity, but I must confess that I admire Scribe as much. He shows his exceptional character in this as he does in everything.

The authors who consult their friends may be divided into three classes : the humble who have no confidence in themselves, the vain who never lack confidence in themselves, and the men of parts, the

men of strength, who listen to, appreciate, and benefit by, everything. At the first critical remarks that fall from your lips, the humble are sure to exclaim : ' Indeed you are right, it is very bad.' And they are ready there and then to condemn the whole of the work and to throw it into the fire. One is always obliged to snatch their '*Æneid*' from their hands. But that class of author is not very numerous.

The vain ones look surprised, smile disdainfully, and show great irritation. They are the grandsons of Oronte.\* Ancelot† was a type of that kind. After having listened to one of his comedies and overwhelmed him with the adjectives, 'delightful,' 'charming,' 'exquisite,' a listener ventured timidly to remark, 'The second act is perhaps a little too long.' 'I think it too short,' replied Ancelot emphatically. Then come the masters of their craft, whose distinctive trait is not only to ask for advice, but to listen to it, to profit even by bad advice, to interpret the listener's silence, to read on his face the effect of their words, to allow for the character and intelligence of each of their counsellors, in short, to judge their judges ; this is the characteristic of superior men. Some short fragments from the correspondence of the two friends will tend to show in what manner the

\* The Oronte of Molière's '*Misanthrope*,' not the one of '*L'École des Femmes*.'—TR.

† The sometime Director of the Vaudeville and member of the Académie-Française.—TR.



one gave advice, in what manner the other profited by it.

'SÉRICOURT, 24th September, 1842.

'I have entirely reconstructed the fourth act, mind, from the first to the last line, and considerably altered the others. Will you and can you let me read them to you once more, if it be not trespassing too much on your friendship?'

'SÉRICOURT, October, 1845

'I will have finished my second volume (this time it was a novel) in three days. I'll bring it to Paris to you and put it to school with you for a while. The first volume has fared too well at your hands for its brother not to claim the same care.

'Since you went away, I have read all your remarks on my three acts, or nearly all, for your remarks, dear friend, are an astounding and gigantic bit of work, and like everything you do, conscientious to a degree. From what I have read, you are perfectly right; all your notes are in excellent taste, and marked by profound criticism, but I am really at a loss whether to thank you or not, for now I feel bound to attend to every one of your suggestions and that will take me a long while.'

Mahérault in addition to the subtle critical faculty which he brought to bear upon his functions of dramatic adviser, had two qualities essential to the part. He only advised you to do that of which you were capable. I was always complimenting him upon that acute perception, and one day I told him in connection with this a capital anecdote about Gouvion Saint-Cyr which I had from M. Guizot.

Gouvion Saint-Cyr was only second-in-command to General ——— in Spain. The enemy was harassing our army corps, and there was a doubt whether we ought to give battle or retreat. The general-in-chief summons a council of war at which Gouvion Saint-Cyr strongly pronounces in favour of a retreat, which advice is adopted. An hour before the time



fixed for striking the tents, the general-in-chief is severely wounded by the bursting of a shell during a reconnaissance. Gouvion Saint-Cyr assumes the command, immediately countermands the retreat, gives battle and wins the day. 'Why did you advise the general-in-chief this morning not to give battle?' asked one of his officers. 'Because he would have lost it,' was the answer.

Mahérault's second merit was that he belonged to what I would call the *inventive* advisers, to those intellects which are both active and sensible at the same time, who without even substituting their judgment to yours, show you your own road and complete your own idea. One day, while we were reading 'Adrienne Lecouvreur' to him, Mahérault said 'Your piece wants another personage.' 'And where, in the name of all that's sensible are we to put your additional personage?' 'We'll put him in the place of one who is already there.' 'What do you mean?' 'What I say; you have got a Duc d'Aumont who plays a very insignificant part. He is only a kind of court newsman. Why not put a little abbé in his place?' 'Admirable,' exclaims Scribe, 'that will be a genuine eighteenth century figure. An actress, a princess, a military hero, and an abbé; now the picture is complete.' And in fact, that one figure introduced into the action, modified all our lighter scenes; tittle-tattle, love, gallantry, everything assumed a different complexion when the recital of it came

from his lips, and he ran and fluttered and buzzed throughout the piece like some winged creature. 'You are entitled to author's fees,' we said to Mahérault, laughing.

The cause of Mahérault's thorough knowledge of scenic conditions was his inordinate love of the drama. As I have said, he had commenced going to the play when he was two years old, and he still went at eighty. Scribe had had him put on the permanent and 'first night' free-list everywhere and he was to be seen everywhere, operas, comedies, farces, melodramas, scratch performances, rehearsals, he never missed anything. He always arrived before the *lever de rideau*. When he went to the theatre, the dinner at his house was earlier than usual, lest he should miss a scene. One day, while they were rehearsing a piece of his son-in-law's, M. de Najac, Mahérault was eighty-two then, he jumped over a seat so lightly that M. Saint-Germain who is as sprightly in ordinary conversation as he is on the stage, said to the author: 'I have just noticed your young pickle of a father-in-law jumping from the pit into the stalls.' Towards his latter days, his doctor having forbidden him to leave home unless the weather was favourable, his son-in-law was bound to come to his room after every première, no matter how late, and to give him full particulars of the performance; he would not wait until next morning.

Assuredly it was not his physical strength that

kept him young in body as well as in mind until the last moments of his life. He had just sufficient muscular substance to carry him through, it was a second passion which often proved but one and the same with the first, a passion as healthy and ardent as that of the sportsman, the passion of the art collector.

### III

Art collectors who are millionaires have no doubt a claim to the world's consideration; I have known some very able connoisseurs among them, but they always lack the two great marks of the collector, they are not called upon to make sacrifices and to give themselves trouble. With them it is in nine cases out of ten only a question of vanity. They as it were commission someone else to have taste for them, they find the money and on the strength of their representative's knowledge they are promoted to the noble rank of amateurs. But to ferret out bit by bit and in the course of many years, a collection of artistic objects which constitutes in itself a work of art, to discover what was unknown, to appreciate at its right artistic value what had been misjudged, to bring to light forgotten talent, to resuscitate the art productions of a whole period, to be running hither and thither, to compare, to take counsel, to sacrifice part of one's well earned rest, to stint one's self even in one's barest needs, to do all this in order to get together, after forty years of

hard work, as did M. Sauvageot for instance, a collection worth several hundred thousand francs out of a yearly salary which never exceeded four thousand, that's what I would call science, patience, and passionate love and taste for art. And Mahérault who throughout his life had never anything but his government place to depend on has left an altogether rare collection of drawings, prints and engravings of the eighteenth century. That was the period he had selected as his domain in which he took up a distinctly separate, albeit small space, namely, in everything that bore upon the drama.

It was he who designed for the magnificent collection of stage dresses by Martinet fifty or sixty portraits of the principal Paris artists in their best parts, for he drew very well, and among his papers, I find the following charming note:—

‘MY DRAWINGS IN SEPIA

‘The scene of the Armchair from “Le Mariage de Figaro.” Scene from 4th Act of Chénier’s “Henry VIII.” Scene from 4th Act of Chénier’s “Charles IX.” Scene from 2nd Act of Legouvè’s “Mort de Henri IV.”’

And at the end of the notes I find the price put upon the drawings by Mahérault:—

‘CHARLES IX, 25 francs.

‘PHILIPPE II, 25 francs.

‘HENRI IV, 25 francs’

Total 75 francs. Not a very high figure, but how eloquent in its very modesty; how well it shows us the saving penny by penny of the poor collector

No doubt, Mahérault must have thought it hard to sell his personal work at such low prices, but equally no doubt, he was watching for the opportunity of purchasing the work of someone else and those 75 francs filled him with joy for they enabled him to buy the drawing of some master which may be worth 300 francs to-day. Heaven alone knows how many times he found himself face to face with Sardou at the dealers' in eighteenth century prints. He knew every amateur, he had turned over every portfolio of value, he studied and annotated every catalogue, he attended every sale. One ran against him in every nook and corner of Paris, hurrying along, pale, tall, thin, with his white beard gleaming, his near-sighted eyes peering into every shop window, his coat partly buttoned, the whole man looking like one of the personages in his collection, like an old portrait of some forgotten artist, giving one the impression of some oddity. And an oddity he was, assuredly. Perhaps the reader would like to know the dimly defined idea he was for ever pursuing, or, rather, the idea that haunted him ; well, it was the idea of the future sale of his collection.

The day of the sale of his collection is to the collector the last day of judgment. That day virtually determines whether he is to be classed among the connoisseurs or among the dupes. That day justifies or condemns the sacrifices he has made in the indulgence of his passion. For the collector not only



stints himself; I have known some (though Mahérault was not of the number) who, in order to increase their collection have grudged their families their daily food; they stifle the still small voice of their conscience with the excuse that at the sale their collection—like the trusty servant of the gospel—will remit to their heirs ten times the talents with which it had been entrusted. Mahérault often said to his daughter: ‘I hope to leave you a “magnificent sale.”’

The sale took place a twelvemonth after his death, I fancy that on that day the shade of Mahérault which must be diaphanous indeed, if our shade resemble our body, must have found means to slip into that auction room, in which he spent so many hours of his life and have quivered with pride and joy when it heard the auctioneer state the splendid total of the proceeds—four hundred and twenty-five thousand francs. Thus, ‘if after death shades feel,’ it must have been one of his red letter days in Paradise.

## CHAPTER VIII

The Portrait Gallery continued.—M. Etienne de Jouy, the Father of the Parisian Chronique.—The Salon of M. de Jouy.—M. de Jouy as a Benedict.—Mdlle. de Jouy, afterwards Mme. Boudonville.—M. de Jouy's Guests.—M. de Jouy's Talent for Parody.—M. de Jouy as a Librettist and Dramatist.—A Glimpse of Talma.—The Libretto of 'La Vestale.'—A First Glimpse of Meyerbeer.—The Libretto of 'Guillaume Tell' suggested by Mme. Boudonville.—Intended for Meyerbeer—A Silhouette of Rossini,

### I

DURING the greater part of Louis-Philippe's reign, the two rival schools of French literature had virtually selected two drawing-rooms as their respective headquarters; those of M. Nodier and of M. de Jouy. These two names may be taken as the two standards under which the opposing factions fought. I was a frequent visitor to both these centres, but so much has been written about that presided over by M. Nodier that I will only speak about M. de Jouy's. I have met many interesting personages there, one of the most curious was undoubtedly the host himself.

A few years before the great revolution, M. de Jouy began life as a 'middy' in the King's navy and took part in several naval engagements against the English,

losing two fingers in one of these, the name of which I forget. If at that time someone had told him that one day he would be a famous *littérateur*, poet and member of the Académie-Française, he would certainly have been greatly surprised. At that period he was a handsome, brave, and somewhat foolhardy young fellow, a kind of eighteenth century d'Artañon, tall, robust, with charming features, a quantity of fair hair, drooping in wild, unkempt locks on his shoulders, a pair of magnificent, large blue eyes, a mobile mouth, an inexhaustible flow of animal spirits, and in excellent health. The world smiled on him, and he smiled on the world. Literature and poetry occupied but a small space in his mental existence, his whole library consisted of a small volume of 'Horace' from which he quoted constantly, and of one book of Voltaire's which he carried upon his person. When he came to Paris, he made his *début* in literature as a general opens a battle, by two cannon shots, the libretto of 'La Vestale' first, then later on 'L'Ermite de la Chaussée d'Antin.'

As far as the latter went, everything about it was positively new, its form, its title, its subject, and its author. In his capacity of a man of the world, and addicted to its pleasures, as a brilliant and somewhat pugnacious talker he recorded the incidents of his daily life while recording the daily existence of the big city. What we call 'Parisianism,' took its start with 'L'Ermite de la Chaussée-d'Antin.' The school

of the modern *chronique* (*causerie*, gossip, table-talk, call it what you will), sprang from 'L'Ermite de la Chaussée-d'Antin.' This or that chapter of 'L'Ermite' would make an admirable comedy in itself. 'Le Parrain' of Scribe is taken from a page of 'L'Ermite.' One of the most remarkable scenes of 'Les Faux Bonshommes' (Barrière's), I mean the scene of the imaginary castles (*châteaux en Espagne*, castles in the air) enacted by the husband *à propos* of the death of his wife is borrowed from 'L'Ermite de la Chaussée-d'Antin.' The most curious fact, though, in connection with all this was that in a little while the author and his work became, as it were, one. People called him the 'Hermit,' he accepted the title and with it the part to a certain extent. Being the owner of a small dwelling-house in the Rue des Trois Frères, (actually a part of the Rue Taitbout), he conceived the idea of giving it the appearance of a hermitage. He built a tiny chapel in his little garden. Truly the divinity inhabiting that chapel was Voltaire and he, M. de Jouy, was the officiating priest. His dressing gown was a monk's frock, the belt a rope. The way to his study was by a steep, winding staircase, the 'bannister' of which was also a rope, in this instance knotted. In addition to this, M. de Jouy, though still young 'doubled' the two parts of the proverbial character, he remained a devil, while becoming a hermit.\*

\* There is a French proverb to the effect that when the devil gets

'The salon of M. de Jouy' is the first line of the synopsis of this chapter. M. de Jouy had, in fact, a salon, which in the literary acceptation of the term, it is a rare and difficult thing to have. It is not given to everyone to have a salon, however rich, powerful and aristocratic he may be. The first and foremost requisite in a salon is a woman to enact the hostess. Now, it so happened that M. de Jouy, though married, had no wife. He was too fond of other men's wives to have remained attached for any length of time to his own. Shortly after his marriage with a young English girl, of very high birth and of a distinctly original turn of intellect, there was a separation. I am afraid I have used the wrong word ; for there was neither separation nor scandal. The tie was not severed, it was simply unfastened. There was not the slightest grievance against the wife ; there was no serious cause of reproach against the husband, unless it was that he gradually lost the habit of going home. Luckily the union, though short, had borne fruit : a daughter, who was brought up by her mother until she was sixteen. But she often saw her father, she worshipped both her parents and bore a remarkable likeness to both. She had in addition to the mother's refined heart and lofty sentiments, the brilliancy and lively temperament of the father and these qualities, enhanced by that strong moral sense

old, he becomes a hermit. Everyone knows the English version : When the devil was sick, etc.—TR.



which often forces itself upon young people placed in difficult situations, had made her a charming and altogether individual woman. Throughout her life she endeavoured, not to reunite those who were parted, their utter dissimilarity of character effectually forbade such an attempt, but to bring them more or less together.

M. de Jouy willingly lent himself to the idea, for his position as a man separated from his wife affected him no more seriously than his position as a married man. Wedlock had been such a trivial thing with him, that he failed to regard it as a chain, let alone as a sacrament. I remember as if it were yesterday, his saying to me in connection with 'Louise de Lignerolles,' in which I had attempted to depict the often terrible consequences of the husband's adultery: 'But my dear boy, all this is simply so much nonsense. Who, in the name of all that's good, gave you the idea of building five acts and a tragic catastrophe on the peccadillo of a husband who happens to have a mistress. You are assuredly not under the impression that you are going to draw tears from anyone with that kind of thing?'

When his daughter was sixteen, she returned to his roof and kept house for him. It was not an easy task. The reader has heard of the sentence Mme. Necker, the wife of the austere Minister, wrote in her pocket-book: 'Not to forget to re-compliment M. Thomas'

on his 'Pétréide.'\* M. de Jouy's gatherings were not altogether made up of people who had constantly to be 're-complimented,' namely, poets and *littérateurs*. There were a good many orators and political men, such as Manuel, Benjamin Constant, the latter with his fair hair, and German-student look, flitting from group to group, and scattering his brilliant paradoxes broadcast. Added to these came the beauties of the Restoration and the Monarchy of July, such as Mme. Sampayo, Mme. de Vatry, Mme. Friant, 'sailing through the dazzling halls, their brows bedecked with flowers,' as the poet says. There was, furthermore, a crowd of foreigners of both sexes, attracted thither by the great reputation of the host. On one or two occasions I met Rostopchine there, and heard him talk. Well, M. de Jouy's daughter, married to a young and charming staff-officer, M. Boudonville, steered her course amidst all these celebrities, careful of their susceptibilities, of their jealousy of one another, without giving umbrage to anyone, without committing a single blunder or mistake. She constantly reminded me of those skilful gondoliers, gliding so deftly and gracefully through the network of the canals in Venice. Her father's jovial, cordial and spontaneous temperament provided the lighter notes in the entertainment. His was, no doubt, the liveliest imagination I have ever known. Conversation meant

\* The original word is *relouer*, which is as questionable French as 're-compliment,' is questionable English.—TR.

to him what champagne means to other people. It stimulated, nay, intoxicated him. Towards midnight, he took the conversational bit between his teeth, and the drollest conceits followed one another like rockets at a display of fireworks. One evening the conversation turned on Victor Hugo whom he detested, and forthwith he gave us a parody of 'Lucrèce Borgia,' which as a side-splitting burlesque surpassed by far that of 'L'Harnali, ou la Contrainte par cor,' by Duvert and Lauzanne.\* Being such a fire eater as to stutter and stammer in his excitement, M. de Jouy's bursts of anger became positively comic. The slightest attempt to criticise one of his favourites, to question this or that lofty idea, to defend this or that platitude, called forth a torrent of exaggerated language which irresistibly reminded one of Alceste.† And people laughed at him as they laugh at Alceste, they liked him as they like Alceste; he virtually showed me how the part of Alceste should be enacted so as to be comic throughout while never ceasing to be sympathetic. I remember a remark of his which is thoroughly characteristic of the spontaneity of his mind. He was sitting on a small couch between his daughter and a foreign guest who was overwhelming him with

\* The title of this burlesque is in itself a burlesque. I will endeavour to explain it to the reader, though I am by no means sure of succeeding. 'L'Harnali' which stands for 'Hernani' is a corruption of 'l'hallali,' the 'death' sounded by the French huntsman. 'Contrainte par cor' may mean imprisonment for debt (*contrainte par corps*), suffering from a corn, or coercion by means of a hunting-horn. The reader knows the important part the hunting-horn plays in 'Hernani.'—TR.

† Molière's Alceste in 'Le Misanthrope,'—TR.

hyperbolic compliments. 'Do you hear what this gentleman says of me, my dear?' he laughed. 'Well, he does not express by a hundredth part what I think on the subject.'

The literary life of M. de Jouy may be summed up by three dates, which again may be summed by three names: 'La Vestale,' 'L'Ermite de la Chaussée d'Antin' and 'Sylla.'

'Sylla' was one of the most startling successes of the century. It has been asserted that the success was entirely due to a wig, because Talma appeared in it with the Napoleonic lock on his forehead. Those detractors had best be referred to the words of Alexandre Dumas, who without being compelled by the least official mission made the journey from Paris to Saint-Germain on the day of M. de Jouy's funeral, in order to sing the praises of the bold novelty of the fifth act of that play on the author's grave. To this eulogy I would like to add two significant traits of Talma's talent. The fourth act was founded on a scene which inspired both the author and actor with great hopes, while at the same time they were greatly afraid of it. Sylla falls asleep, and in the midst of his slumbers his victims are supposed to uprise before him like the terrible phantoms of Shakespeare's 'Richard III.' It was expected that this 'somniaambulism of remorse' would be productive of an enormous effect as enacted by Talma. But a great practical difficulty attended with great danger presented itself.



How should Sylla fall asleep? The supposed difficulty would provoke a smile nowadays, but at that time the question was a grave one. Was he to fall asleep in a chair? Under such conditions the effect would be lost. Was he to fall asleep on a bed? In that case he would have had to lie down before the public, and how could he risk doing such a thing? That an actor should deliver his lines seated or walking up and down was admissible, but lying down. Heaven forbid the thought, it would show a positive disrespect to the public. Talma was in a great state of excitement. Fortunately, he was not the man to give in easily when he fancied he had got hold of a tremendous effect, so he bravely has a couch placed on the stage, and when the terrible scene draws nigh, seats himself on it in a careless, matter-of-course way. Then he delivers his first lines, his hands resting on his knees. At the next few lines he lifts one of his arms, extends one of his legs and puts it, without seeming to pay attention to it, on the bed. He goes on speaking while stretching it at full length, the other leg follows suit, his body gradually leans back, his head finally reclines on the pillow and Sylla is asleep, without the public having noticed as it were, that he was 'going to bed.' How skilful one had to be in those days in order to be bold.

I feel reluctant to dismiss the piece without recording another stroke of genius in Talma's 'by-play.' In the third act there is a very magnificent scene



where the dictator, surrounded by his courtiers, is reminded of the people who are being butchered outside by heartrending and hostile cries. Immediately afterwards one of the crowd rushes on to the stage and makes straight for Sylla, exclaiming :

‘ Combien en proscris tu, Sylla ? ’  
‘ Je ne sais pas. ’

is the answer.

The reply befits the author of the Cornelian Laws, and Talma according to his inspiration, the tone of the man of the crowd, the countenances of his courtiers, uttered that terrible sentence in different fashions. On some nights he merely allowed it to drop negligently from his lips, superciliously, as if paying no attention whatsoever to his words and producing in that way a horrible contrast to the fury of his interlocutor. On others, he would hiss the phrase at him like a wild beast and with such violence as to terrify his audience. He was a great genius indeed. It was not a success the actor scored, it was a genuine triumph. Let me hasten to add, for the sake of the author, that from that day forward, M. de Jouy ceased to be ‘ L’Ermite ’ to become ‘ the author of “ Sylla. ” ’

## II

The libretto of ‘ La Vestale ’ had raised M. de Jouy to the position of our foremost lyrical poet and procured him the patronage of the men whom I consider the most wretched in creation, the dramatic

composers. Can the reader imagine a more terrible martyrdom than that of a Jupiter with a Minerva in his head or brain and no axe or hatchet at hand to deliver him. The operatic composer is in a still worse plight. Not only can he not bring forth by himself, but he cannot conceive by himself. His brain may be teeming with grandiose, striking ideas, quivering with life; they are cursed with barrenness unless he find what we term a poet to embody them. Consequently M. de Jouy was positively besieged by those unhappy petitioners in quest of a libretto. One day a young fellow, of a distinctly Jewish cast of countenance, below the middle height, dressed in very good taste, with excellent though reserved manners, and the address of a gentleman calls upon him. He is the bearer of a letter of introduction from Spontini, his name is Meyerbeer, he is the composer of several Italian operas, among others the 'Crocato,' and anxious to write for the Paris Opéra. Spontini has recommended him to his librettist as a musician of great promise. Mme. Boudonville was working in her father's study, seated near the window looking out upon the garden. The poet and the musician begin to talk, various subjects, names and titles are suggested one after another, some are received with more or less favour, others are scornfully rejected, when all at once Mme. Boudonville who had, up till then, been listening without saying a word, timidly joins in the conversation. 'I fancy,' she says, 'that

the story of Guillaume Tell would make a capital subject for a libretto. He combines all the necessary features, he is a grand character, he is the hero of a very interesting situation ; his surroundings would furnish a very excellent local picture.' 'Bravo,' exclaims M. de Jouy. 'Admirable,' adds Meyerbeer, and there and then the plan is drawn out, the outlines of the principal characters put in, etc., etc.

And now, how did it happen that Rossini composed the music of 'Guillaume Tell,' and that Meyerbeer did not compose it? I am unable to tell, nevertheless, I am thankful to Chance or Fate, seeing that to it we owe the masterpiece of modern music. Nowadays the libretto of 'Guillaume Tell' is very severely handled, the verses are constantly being ridiculed, but I never heard anyone make greater sport of them than M. de Jouy himself. 'My dear Jouy,' said Rossini to him one day, 'I have taken the liberty to change a word in the chorus that accompanies Mdle. Taglioni's dance. You wrote—

"Toi que l'aiglon ne suivrait pas."  
(Thou whom the eaglet would not follow.)

'I have put instead—

"Toi que l'oiseau ne suivrait pas."  
(Thou whom the bird would not follow.)

'And I am much obliged to you for doing it,' exclaims M. de Jouy. 'The eaglet does convey the idea of a dancing bird, does it not?' 'Then why

did you put that eaglet there ?' asked Rossini, laughing. 'I didn't put it there, it's that idiot of a Hippolyte Bis,' says M. de Jouy. 'Then why did you take that idiot of a Hippolyte Bis for your collaborateur?' inquires Rossini, laughing louder than ever. 'Why, why? Because I am a good-natured idiot myself, who does not know his own mind. I was told that he is poor, but clever, that he had written a tragedy on Attila which was performed at the Odéon. . . . I never saw his tragedy, but they were always quoting a line which was considered sublime :—

“Ses regards affamés devoraient l'univers.”

'It's those confounded "hungry looks" that have caused all the mischief. Hippolyte Bis called me a great poet, after that I became like a bit of putty in his hands, and allowed him to introduce in my libretto a lot of verses which will be a standing disgrace to me with posterity for centuries and centuries. For there is no mistake about it, thanks to you, I am immortal and while there is one opera left, they'll go on singing verses, like that one—

“Aux reptiles je l'abandonne

“Et leur horrible faim lui répond d'un tombeau.”

'And to think that I have put my name to them. Oh, the brute.'

All this happened and was said on the Boulevard Montmartre just by the Passage des Panoramas where

we happened to run against Rossini, who had just come from home. He had a fortnight's stubble on his chin. 'You are looking at my beard,' he said. 'This is in consequence of a vow I made. I am just finishing my orchestration, and lest I should be tempted to go out to dinner or an "at home," I have taken an oath not to shave myself until my work is finished.

'Are you pleased with what you are doing?' asked M. de Jouy.

'It isn't bad,' he replied with a smile. 'It's Gluck, *with ideas of my own*. My chief exertions bear on the recitatives and basses. You had better notice the ballet music also, *it is somewhat sad, as befits a people in that position*. But you may make your mind easy, friend Jouy. There are perhaps a few verses that are bad, but the libretto is all right, and I trust I shall not spoil it.'

The result is known to everyone. On the first night the overture met with a tremendous success. The first act also produced a great effect, and the second was simply one long triumph from beginning to end. The third and fourth acts met with a somewhat chilling reception, and on entering M. de Jouy's drawing-room at midnight, Rossini said, 'It is a *quasi fiasco*.'

The life that had begun so brilliantly ended placidly and sweetly, though somewhat sadly. During his latter years, when he was already very old



M. de Jouy lost the use of his legs, his imagination forsook him and even his intellect became clouded.\* Well, a strange thing happened, which proves that our dominant faculties die last within us and remain standing amidst the ruins of our organisation like a column amidst the wreck of an overtoppled temple. Even when his reason was partly gone, the fast gathering darkness was lighted up now and again by a sudden flash of wit. One day, during one of his usual outbursts of temper, for, alas our defects as well as our good qualities adhere to us—he suddenly pushed his daughter away from him, saying, ‘Go to the devil.’ . . . Then he added all of a sudden and with a charming smile, ‘Don’t trouble yourself, he would not take you.’

I have seen few more touching sights than that of that father and daughter. Their parts had positively become reversed. He had become her child, she his mother. She chided him, and every now and then a look, a gesture, an expression of his face showed that he was conscious of that reversal of parts, and that he derived a kind of gratification from it. Instead of feeling humiliated, he seemed to be lovingly affected by it. His son-in-law had been appointed governor of the castle of Saint-Germain, and it comforted the old man to end his days in that splendid historical dwelling. It afforded him an unexpected pleasure on the Sundays and holidays; his roomy armchair was

\* M. de Jouy died in 1846 at the age of eighty-two—TR.

taken to the magnificent circular balcony with its superb forged iron railing. Wrapped in an ample dressing gown, his eyes fixed on the large open square, he sat watching the arrival of the young couples and joyous groups that had come to spend their leisure day in the country ; he rarely took his eyes off them as, amidst loud laughter, they made their way to the rustic drinking shops, the small restaurants and tiny theatre ; he tried to get a glimpse of them as they rested beneath the spreading branches of the natural arbours, he strained his ears to catch snatches of their songs, resounding through the open windows, and at such times there was a momentary gleam of youth and gaiety on the withered, wrinkled features. The fast waning imagination had conjured up, for an instant only, one of the chapters of 'L'Ermite de la Chaussée-d'Antin.'

## CHAPTER IX

The Portrait Gallery continued.—Lamartine.—Lamartine's Pride.—His Manias.—Lamartine's opinion of himself and of La Fontaine.—His opinion of Rossini.—Béranger's opinion of one of Lamartine's Poems.—Lamartine's kindness.—As a Statesman.—His first appearance in the Chamber.—His wonderful capacity for grasping a Subject.—His hatred of the Napoleonic Legend.—His Prophecy with regard to the ultimate result of it.—Lamartine and an Anecdote of Turner, the Painter.—How 'l'Histoire des Girondins' was composed.—Lamartine goes to see an old Member of the Convention.—Lamartine's Impecuniosity.—The Revolution of '48.—A Glimpse of a Revolutionary.—Lamartine at the Hotel-de-Ville.—Lamartine misjudged.—Madame de Lamartine.—Her Devotion.—Lamartine's Funeral.

### I

THERE is one thing which has never failed to strike me : the marvellous instinct of the public in recognising genius at its first cry. The moment the man of genius appears, the moment he speaks, the hearts of all go out to him and proclaim him king. It would seem as if all his future achievements are written beforehand in what he has just accomplished. The début contains, as it were, the advance summary of a long life of glory. Apologising for the comparison when applied to a poet, I feel inclined to say that it

is the splendour of a magnificent sunlit day, entirely foretold in the first ray at dawn.

This was the case with Lamartine. 'Les Méditations' had not 'been out' four-and-twenty hours, and lo and behold, by some nameless phenomenon of moral electricity, that name, unknown the day before, was already on everyone's lips. M. de Talleyrand himself, startled by the noise, took the book and read it from beginning to end in a few hours snatched from sleep, and that same morning he wrote to one of his friends: 'Unto us a poet has been born this night.'

I will not stop to analyse the numerous poetical beauties of Lamartine's works; I am in too great a hurry to come to the man to linger with the poet.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

Lamartine has been too often accused of pride, and in support of the accusation people always quote that famous reply of his to a father who had taken his son to see him: 'Well, Monsieur de Lamartine, what do you think of my young fellow?' 'He was not sufficiently moved at the sight of me,' replied the poet. To those who take the trouble to think, and who knew Lamartine, there is not the least sign of pride in this. He was not thinking of himself when he uttered the words, he was thinking of some great reputation. He would have never said what he did say if he had meant to apply it to himself; in apply-

ing it to every man of renown, he was right, and more than right. A young man incapable of admiration is not a young man. Furthermore, I am going to tell the reader something which will astonish him. Lamartine was unpretending, of course relatively unpretending. Some of his pretensions were, to say the least, very odd; for instance, he thought himself a great economist, a great authority on wine growing, and a great architect. 'Young man,' he said one day to the son of one of his friends, 'take a good look at me, there, just at the forehead, and you'll be able to say to yourself that you have seen the greatest living authority on money matters.' Victor Hugo's fame as a poet gave him not the least concern, but he envied M. Duchâtel his reputation as the first authority on wine growing. 'He is only an amateur,' he said. 'I am, as it were, a piece of the vineyards on our slopes.' Finally, every visitor to Saint-Point was taken to see a horrid little portico, painted in startling colours, and made up of two columns in heaven alone knows what style, or rather belonging to all styles. 'My dear fellow,' he used to say, 'half-a-century hence, people will make a pilgrimage to come and see this. My poetry will be forgotten, but they will say, "there is no doubt about it, the man who did this knew how to build."' To believe one's self clever at doing things of which one has not the most elementary notions does not in itself constitute a claim to originality, but it is assuredly an



original trait in a man's character not to overrate his talents in the art of which he is a perfect master, and here we touch upon one of the most curious sides of this very complex nature. Modesty, with the superior intellect is, after all, but the spirit of comparison. Well, when Lamartine compared himself to his contemporaries, he considered himself very great, but when he compared himself to geniuses of the first water, or even to himself, that is, when he drew a parallel between what he had done and what he might have done, he was, I repeat, modest. One day, I ventured to say to him, 'I wish you to explain to me a fact which seems to defy explanation at my own hands: I like La Fontaine's verses as well as yours, I have an equal facility for learning them by heart; I experience an equal pleasure in repeating them to myself; but at the end of six months I still know the verses of La Fontaine and no longer know yours. What is the reason?' 'I am going to tell you,' he said. 'La Fontaine writes with a pen and even with a graving-tool, I write with a brush; he writes, I merely colour, his outlines are clearly drawn, mine are vague; consequently it is very natural that his should remain stamped on the memory and that mine should become gradually effaced.' Struck and moved by the justice and simplicity of the answer, I went on. 'Nevertheless,' I said in a tone of deep conviction, 'no French poet has been more richly endowed than you. You have as much genius as the

greatest among them.' 'It may be,' he replied smiling, 'but I have not as much talent; talent, my dear friend, is the thing acquired by work and will. I have never worked, and I cannot correct. Whenever I have tried to rewrite some verses, I have only made them worse. Just compare me to Victor Hugo as a versifier, why, I am a simple learner compared to him.' 'You are much more like that other spoilt child of the Muses, and who, like you, never knew what it is to make an effort or to engage in a struggle, and who produced his notes in the same way you produce your verses, I mean Rossini.' 'Don't put me on a level with Rossini. Rossini *has* produced works. He composed "Guillaume Tell," "Othello," "Le Barbier." I have only produced essays.'

He did not exactly mean what he said, he perhaps counted on my admiration to contradict him, and he would have felt greatly astonished if I had taken his definition literally; nevertheless, behind this exaggeration of terms I might almost say of blasphemy, there was a true and sincere feeling; to borrow the clever expression of Cardinal de Retz, Lamartine recognised the fact of not having given his worth full play. People have often hinted that the disdain with which he spoke of his own verses was only so much affectation, nothing better than a comedy. No man was less of a comedian than Lamartine. A diplomatist, yes. Clever, and so clever at times as to be almost bungling, but never descending to the trick of

vulgar 'posing.' He had a sincere disdain for his poetical grandeur, because he felt himself to be a poet very superior to his works, and above all, a man very superior to the poet, as will be seen directly. Hence there was in his vanity as an author a kind of simplicity and unaffected good humour which added to his powers of fascination. I can hear him ask me, as if it were to-day : 'Did you read my last verses in 'Le Conseiller du Peuple?' 'No.' 'Then read them, my dear fellow, they are very pretty.' Then correcting himself, 'Well, I mean rather pretty.' He took his own measure, he judged himself, and what is more rare, he allowed others to judge him. Béranger had become very enthusiastic about 'Jocelyn.' 'My dear friend,' he said to Lamartine, 'it is a masterpiece of poesy, emotion, and inspiration.' Then he added with a mischievous smile, characteristic of him : 'But what a pity about those three or four hundred lines which you gave your concierge to compose.' What did Lamartine do? Laughed ; for he thought the criticism very clever and amusing and went repeating it everywhere. That is very unlike the '*genus irritabile vatum*.' There never was in fact, an instance of self-respect less irritable and less prone to irritate. All the petty passions of poets, envy, hatred, vindictiveness, were foreign to his character. He proved that well enough in his poetical war with Barthélemy. The poor creature had held him up to public indignation, to scorn, to ridicule. Well, in his admir-

able 'Épître à Némesis,' Lamartine could never rise to anger nor descend to contempt, he stopped at mere disdain. And even then, as if the feeling were unbearable to him, he tears himself away from it, he plies his wings, soars beyond, and interrupting his dithyrambic, he addresses the offender in words of evangelic kindness and forgiveness.—

'Un jour, de nobles pleurs laveront ce délire,  
Et ta main étouffant le son qu'elle a tiré,  
Plus juste, arrachera des cordes de ta lyre  
La corde injurieuse où la haine à vibré.

'Pour moi, j'aurai vidé la coupe d'amertume  
Sans que ma lèvre même en garde un souvenir,  
Car mon âme est un feu qui brûle et qui parfume  
Ce qu'on jette pour la ternir !'

Here we have Lamartine in his natural grand attitude, and this "Épître à Némesis," marking as it were the first steps of the poet in the path of public affairs, brings me naturally to the orator and to the statesman.

## II

One evening in the last years of his life, Lamartine was seated by his fireside, his head reclining on his chest, in that somnolent state which had become habitual with him, and which was a condition between sleeping and dreaming. A couple of friends were seated not far away from him and talking in a low voice. The conversation gradually growing more animated, they unconsciously raised their voices, and the one said to the other: 'I would sooner have

written "Les Méditations" than founded the Second Republic.' Lamartine, giving a big yawn, turned round and asked: 'What were you saying, dear friend?' The friend slightly correcting the sentence, replied: 'If I had had the choice, I would sooner have written "Les Méditations" than founded the Second Republic.' 'Well,' answered Lamartine, 'that proves to me that you are only a simpleton.' With which he rose from his chair and in a second threw off his drowsiness. 'Let us put aside my own individuality, look at the general question, and judge the immense superiority of the statesman over the poet. The one racking and exhausting his brain in marshalling words and harmonising sounds; the other, being the real Word, that is the thought, the word and the act in one, realising what the poet only dreams, seeing all that is great and good in him convert itself into facts and beneficent facts, into beneficent facts which not only benefit the generations present, but often extend to most distant posterity. Do you know what it means to be a great Statesman? It is a poet in the act of transforming his words into deeds.' To act, the need to act, the hope to be able to act was in fact, the constant preoccupation of him whom the world chooses to regard as a mere sublime dreamer. His most ardent admiration was reserved for Voltaire. And the reason? 'Because,' as he said, 'there is not a single line of his that does not virtually constitute an act: not a word that fell from his pen or lips that



did not play its part in public affairs. Voltaire was for forty years the greatest event of his century. Hence people say the age of Voltaire, as they say the age of Louis XIV, and the age of Pericles.'

To complete the portrait. One day, in one of those rare moments of effusion in which he showed the whole of his thoughts, for beneath the semblance of spontaneity and candour, he was very secretive, and perfectly self-controlled, keeping in his inmost soul certain hidden recesses into which no one, not he himself perhaps, penetrated, one day then, he exclaimed : 'That one might be a Napoleon, less the sword at his side.' Here we have the thought lying deepest in Lamartine's heart. To rule over a great nation by the force of thought, to command by the force of intellect. To be the conqueror of his epoch, its dominant power without shedding a drop of blood, and without imposing upon men any other yoke than that of justice, pity and generosity. 'Dreams and visions,' it will be said. But he managed to realise such a dream for three months, and he pursued the vision for sixteen years.

The ancients named the poets *vates*, which means prophet. No man deserved the name better than Lamartine. He was a seer. Some nameless instinct of divination revealed to him, at the same time, great public crises, and the part he should play in them. When one reads his conversation with Lady Stanhope in his 'Voyage en Orient,' one is astonished at

the clearness with which he marks to himself his own goal, and with the consistency he proceeded towards it. If we study his character from the year 1832, we cannot fail to be struck with it. At his first appearance in the Chamber, he is asked to which party he intends to belong: 'To the socialistic party.' The word had never been heard in a parliamentary assembly. 'Socialistic,' remarks his colleague, 'what does that mean? It is only a word.' 'No,' replies Lamartine, 'it is an idea.' 'But on which side are you going to sit; there appears to be no room for you on any of the benches?' 'In that case,' replies Lamartine with a semi-satirical, semi-confident smile, 'I'll take my seat on the ceiling.' A strange reply, no doubt, but characteristic of him and showing his nature. He always went by instinct to the spot whither wings only could carry him and support him when he got there.

Superficial minds are apt to compare Lamartine as an orator, to a virtuoso who, when he has finished with his bravura songs, launches into poetical dithyrambs, and often out of sheer fancy concerns himself with a few practical questions; for the reader should remember that he was one of the most ardent defenders of railways against Arago; but to those who think, every one of his speeches shows the carefully premeditated conduct of the political man who shirks no problem, because he foresees that the day may come when he will have to solve them all.

One curious fact will show his powers of assimilation. The discussion of a grand project for a canal was down in the order of the day. The deputy who was to defend it falls ill on the very morning of the debate. The interested parties are advised to entrust Lamartine with the task. They go to his house and are told that he is in his bath; nevertheless, they are admitted and after waiting a little while they are enabled to tell him their business. 'But I don't know a single word of the whole of that business,' protests Lamartine. 'We are going to tell you all about it,' is the answer. 'But there is not a man in the Chamber who is less of a civil engineer than I am.' 'That does not matter, a man like you can earn his diploma in a few moments.' 'Very well, tell me what I am to do.' They begin telling him while he remains in his bath, they continue their instructions while he is getting out of it; they never cease while he is dressing, they stay to breakfast and keep on coaching him; and two hours later Lamartine delivers a business speech, which is voted on all sides a marvel of clearness and accuracy. The success was very great, and the surprise greater still; everyone was positively astounded, everybody except Lamartine himself. 'I have been aware for many years of my capacities as a practical man,' he said. 'The people refuse to believe in them because I have composed verse. Perhaps they would have believed if the verses had been bad. Unfortunately there are some

good ones among them, nay some beautiful ones ; that's what has ruined me in their opinion.'

At times, his foresight found vent in the rostrum, in words of prophecy. When the Chamber wished to vote the bill for the return of Napoleon's remains, Lamartine protested. The strange union of liberalism and imperialism under the Restoration had always shocked him. To him it was nothing less than a lie. He refused to be influenced by the fact that all the great poets of the period, French as well as foreign, Manzoni, Lord Byron, Béranger, Victor Hugo and Casimir Delavigne had constituted themselves to coryphæi of Napoleon's immense glory. While fully admiring the genius, he kept relentlessly looking for the tyrant behind the conqueror, and launched against him that terrible anathema.—

'Rien d'humain ne battait sous son épaisse armure.'

This 'coupling' of liberty and despotism seemed to him on the part of liberty nothing less than adulterous ; as a consequence he uprose against that triumphal return with all the strength of his eloquence. No more admirable words ever resounded from that rostrum, and when he felt himself vanquished at last he flung as a parting cry that solemn warning which to-day strikes us as one of the prophecies of the Cassandra of old—'Be it so then, seeing that nothing less will satisfy you. Bring back his remains. Take "the column" as a pedestal for his statue . . . it is,



after all his work, his monument, but I entreat you to write at least on the base "To Napoleon only." (To Napoleon alone).

In a little while Lamartine's opposition grew more and more conspicuous, though he never entered into any conspiracy or plot, whatever might be its aim.\* No one was less of a conspirator than he, first, because to conspire means to be several, and because he liked to march alone; secondly, because his generous disposition disliked any and everything savouring of clandestine machination. But his speeches, his conversation and eventually his books conspired for him; he published 'Les Girondins' which was both a book and an act.

As a book it possesses a kind of peculiar merit, which is pretty well indicated by a sentence of Lamartine himself. On the day he ascended Mount Lebanon for the first time he was so deeply moved by the grandeur of the spectacle that there and then, and face to face with the spectacle itself, he improvised a magnificent description of it. One of his companions, a young officer could not help remarking: 'But where do you see all this, Monsieur de Lamartine? I fail

\* I may be allowed to anticipate my narrative by quoting a fact which sufficiently showed his determination to stand aloof from organised movements. He steadfastly refused to take part in the campaign in favour of the banquets, but when the leaders of the movements had finally convened the people to meet them in the public thoroughfares and afterwards for prudential reasons, hesitated to proceed thither, Lamartine said 'I will go, though I had no companion but my shadow.'

The banquets led indirectly to the revolution of '48.—TR.



to perceive a single thing of what you are describing.' 'I don't wonder at that. I am looking at the scene with the eyes of a poet. You are looking at it with the eyes of a staff-captain.\* Here we have the merit and the defect of Lamartine as a historian at the same time. No one has depicted the grand days of the Revolution with greater force; no one has given more striking portraits of the principal actors in that drama. The reason why? Because he sees them in the aggregate both with his bodily eyes and with those of his imagination; because he transforms without disfiguring them; in one word, because he is a poet. Unfortunately, he is not sufficient of a staff-captain, hence, we have got an eloquent, fascinating book, full of pathos, and admirable just as a whole, but far less perfect in the matter of detail, which imperfection brings home to our minds the difference between accuracy and truth. Lamartine had read a great deal, but at random, unsystematically, and as fancy prompted him. He was as it were, unprovided with the capital of instruction, he had not even a library. A few volumes scattered about his room, trying to constitute themselves into a compact body, though even then they would not have had a permanent abiding place, made up the whole of his baggage as

\* A similar anecdote is told of Turner, when he showed his picture of 'Covent Garden' to a lady who had come to visit him. 'Very beautiful indeed, Mr Turner, but I have been to Covent Garden also, and I fail to see it as you do.' 'Don't you wish you could, madam!' said the painter somewhat bluntly.—TR.

far as study was concerned. When in want of a book, he sent to the nearest bookseller's for it and read it as barristers read a brief, with that marvellous intuition which enables them to put their finger on the very passages they want, as if those passages had been written in red ink. That was Lamartine's method. He devoured books, guessing half the time what was in them, assimilated their contents, transforming the latter as he went and passed on. Buchez and de Roux's '*Histoire Parliaméntaire*' had given him the first idea of '*Les Girondins*,' he developed and completed the idea by the feverish perusal of works pointed out to him by a friend ; then went in quest of more personal information.

A curious story will enable us to get at the very core of that strange book which has been so badly judged as an act. Lamartine had been told that one of the last remnants of the Convention, one of the members of the Committee of Public Safety, and one of the most faithful friends of Robespierre was still alive ; Dr Soubervielle, who was living in one of the Parisian faubourgs. One morning at about ten Lamartine presents himself at his domicile. The old man—he was eighty-three—was still in bed. On seeing the illustrious visitor enter his room, Dr Soubervielle gets into a sitting posture, without showing the slightest emotion at or interest in the advent of the bearer of that great name. The men of that bygone period did not trouble themselves much, and had but scant

admiration for anyone unlike themselves. Slightly inclining his head, covered with a cotton nightcap, the old member of the Convention asked in a curt and trenchant voice: 'What is your business with me, monsieur?' 'I have come to ask you for some correct particulars of the Convention, the history of which I am writing.' 'You!' says the old man, looking fixedly at him; then, with one of those vigorous expressions which formed part of the dictionary of yore, 'You haven't got guts enough to write that history,'\* saying which he lies down again. Lamartine was not a bit shocked at the answer either in the spirit or substance. That past participle did not frighten him in the least. In fact, he made frequent use of it himself, though it jarred somewhat with the general character of his poetry; but, as Pascal has it, the human heart is made up of contrasts. Consequently, he refused to take No for an answer, and finally obtained some valuable particulars.

The book produced an enormous sensation and had a considerable influence on the events of the time, not because it was, as has been unjustly said, an apology of the Reign of Terror; if it had been that, everyone would have shrank from it in horror and disgust, but because it was the apology of the *Republic*.

\* I have considerably toned down the expression in English; in fact, it would have been difficult to find the exact equivalent for the French verb, or rather the past participle of it, used by Dr Soubervielle.—TR.

Lamartine reinstated the latter in its proper place in history by presenting it in a poetical and grandiose form ; he purified it by lifting it out of the mire of atrocities of which it had been the victim rather than the accomplice ; he stirred France to ideas of glory and liberty which seemed so many satires on that pusillanimous policy more or less tainted with the bourgeois spirit, the policy of abandoning the lead to other nations, which I must confess, I have not the courage to blame under the present circumstances, for after all what is a secondary position compared to dismemberment and mutilation ? But in those days we still had the right to have national susceptibilities and to foster grand aspirations. 'Les Girondins' responded to those thoughts. Lamartine translated that undefined agitation of the public mind by the words which have become historical : 'France is intensely bored.' In short, like the grand seabirds, he felt that the storm was nigh, and plied his wings towards a distant goal which he vaguely perceived. One of his friends, uneasy at the evident direction in which his ideas were tending, and having asked him the reason, he replied textually, as follows—'I see whither France is travelling, I'll be waiting for her on the road ten years hence. I'll be there and she'll take me up by the way, and I may be useful to her. . . . ' The words themselves have led us to the Hotel-de-Ville.

## III

Lamartine's dream has been realised ; after a storm of twenty-four hours he stands at the helm. His unaffected greatness was admirable to a degree. During three months he governed, administrated, moderated, ruled, electrified the mob without an illegal act, however trifling, without resorting to violence or armed force, without firing a shot, without shedding a drop of blood. With what did he govern ? With simple words. When men swayed by the most furious passions and the most urgent needs, driven by the most fatal theories knocked at the doors of the Hotel-de-Ville, he merely left the Council, stepped on a chair, spoke for a quarter-of-an-hour, asking ingenuously of those who accompanied him : ' Is that right,' and the passions subsided, the roars and yells ceased, the savage brutes grew subdued ; it was no longer a scene from contemporary history that was being enacted, but a scene from mythology. Such things had not been seen since the days of Orpheus.

There were some magnificent days in Lamartine's existence during those three months. Which was the most magnificent ? The day of the red flag ? No. That of the manifesto ? No. That on which he replied to the madman who clamoured for his head : ' Would to heaven you had it on your shoulders ?' No. In my opinion the 16th April



and the 3rd May were the most memorable days of that three months' reign ; the 16th April because on that day the great statesman showed himself at the same time the most skilful of diplomatists ; the 3rd May, because on that day, Lamartine, in order to save the city, sacrificed more than his life which he had often risked with a smile on his lips, he sacrificed his popularity.

I have in support of my contention some personal and accurate details.

In March 1848, a house situated at the angle of the Rue de Rivoli and the Place des Pyramides and which had until then been used as the audit office of the King's household, was taken possession of in a free and easy revolutionary way by a young man completely unknown three months before. He had suddenly become very formidable by the publication of a paper, the very title of which, 'La Commune de Paris,' was a standing menace. The young fellow's name was Sobrier ; I knew Sobrier ; he was between five- and six-and-twenty, honest, terribly in earnest, and fanatical beyond compare. He had given unquestionable proof of his sincerity, he offered the Republic the whole of his fortune, twelve thousand francs per annum. If all the *intransigeants* were compelled to furnish like proofs, their number would perhaps be even smaller than it is. Nothing touches the masses like disinterestedness, and consequently Sobrier's influence on the working men of Paris was

great and genuine. On the eve or on the morrow of great events, small bills of a reddish violet were found posted up at the street corners, merely displaying the laconic but threatening sentences: 'The people are not satisfied with the events of yesterday. If the provisional government commits such mistakes again, two hundred thousand of us will go and remind them of their duty. *Signed Sobrier.*' The mystery, the brevity, the firmness of the style had the effect of adding largely to the prevalent fear. True, people laughed among themselves at those everlasting two hundred thousand men who appeared regularly on those bills and whom no one had ever seen, but they, nevertheless, shook in their shoes. It was well known that the house in the Rue de Rivoli was the headquarters of the Revolution, whence constantly issued pass-words and orders which the working population obeyed.

On the 16th April Paris was thrown into a great state of excitement by the rumour that a formidable popular movement was impending. I happened to be passing the door of Sobrier's ministry and went in to get the news. The yard, the staircases, every nook and corner resounded with the rattle of rifles; sentries everywhere. As a matter of course, I was going upstairs when a sentry barred the way. 'You can't pass here.' 'I always pass.' 'What is your business, citizen?' 'I wish to see Monsieur Sobrier.' 'Citizen Sobrier is engaged. 'That may be, but he will see me.' 'Your

name, citizen?' 'Monsieur Legouv  .' I am bound to admit that I took a kind of fiendish delight in flinging broadcast the 'monsieurs' in the sanctuary erected to the cult of the civic virtues. All at once the sentry notices an apparently important personage coming down the stairs. 'Citizen,' he yells, 'here is citizen Legouv   who wishes to speak with citizen Sobrier.' 'Let him go up.' 'Much obliged, monsieur,' I answer, and in another moment I find myself in a vast room where I behold Sobrier bending over a big table, his loins girded with a crimson sash with a pair of pistols sticking out of it and rapidly filling in small bulletins which he hands to orderlies crowding round him. 'You are just in time,' he said when he caught sight of me. 'I want recruits, and I'll take you.' 'One moment,' I answered, laughing, 'I am not so easily taken as all that; before I enlist, I must know with whom, for whom, and against whom I am going to fight.' 'I am going to tell you.' Thereupon, all his bulletins having been filled in and distributed, he leads me to a window recess and says: 'It is nothing less than a question of saving Paris from wholesale massacre and burning.' 'I don't understand.' 'There are people who are born scourges of humanity and Blanqui is one. While I am talking to you, he is gathering around him a hundred thousand madmen and savages who obey his slightest commands; in an hour from now they'll start from the Champ de Mars where they have appointed to meet and march to

the Hotel-de-Ville ; they'll overthrow the government and butcher everyone who resists them, having made up their mind to set fire to everything in the event of their getting the worse.' Vastly exaggerated as the story seemed to me—for in those days we failed to conceive the possibility of such monstrous things—Sobrier's face and tone of voice produced a deep impression. 'Oh !' he exclaimed, clutching his head, while the tears stood in his eyes ; 'Oh, and I who dreamt of an angelic republic.' Then interrupting himself for a moment, he went on, in an intensely excited, energetic tone. 'We must prevent this at all costs, and prevent it I will. I have promised Lamartine.' 'Lamartine,' I repeated, 'you saw Lamartine?' 'Yes, he sent for me during the night. We talked together for nearly an hour : it's all over, I am his, body and soul. My dear Legouv  , what a man, what a sublime republican and what a magnificent strategist. He himself drew up the whole of my plan of attack. I am going to mass my men in the streets adjoining the route Blanqui will take, and when his vanguard and the front ranks of his main body shall have passed, I cut his band in two ; he shall find my two hundred thousand men between himself and the Hotel-de-Ville, and I defy him to advance.'

The plan succeeded. The Hotel-de-Ville was preserved from destruction, the provisional government maintained, the city saved, and the day that had been looked forward to with fear and trembling, was



converted into one of triumph for the friends of order ; so that, subsequently, when he was accused of having conspired with Sobrier, Lamartine was able to answer with a smile : ' Yes, I conspired with Sobrier as the lightning conductor conspires with the lightning.'

The 3rd May completed the work of the 16th April. Deeply impressed with the great services rendered by Lamartine, the Assembly proclaimed its intention of vesting in him alone the provisional government. He declined the honour. Then the Assembly proposed that, at anyrate, Ledru-Rollin should be excluded from the direction of affairs, which proposal was still more energetically declined by Lamartine. This act with which he has been most frequently reproached, redounds most to his honour. He did not like M. Ledru-Rollin, the latter's Jacobinistic opinions were repugnant to Lamartine, who was not even affected by Rollin's real oratorical talents. But Lamartine foresaw well enough that if Ledru-Rollin was not a member of the government, he would, perhaps, be its adversary and that with Ledru-Rollin added to the army of riot and disorder, riot and disorder might score the victory. In fact, it would be difficult for anyone to say what the revolutionary movement of the 15th May and the terrible days of June would have been, if on the first of these days, Ledru-Rollin had left the side of Lamartine and on the second headed the revolt. People failed to



see the profound wisdom of Lamartine, they raised the cry of treason. The defenders of the party of moral order of that time accused him of having from sheer ambition and weakness compounded with the revolutionaries, from which it will be seen that the proverb to the effect that 'the days succeed one another, but are not like one another,' does not apply to parties in the State. The conduct of Lamartine was admirable in that respect, inasmuch as he foresaw calumny and announced beforehand the ingratitude which would be his lot. On the day he started from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to repair to the Assembly in order to show it the necessity of electing M. Ledru-Rollin, he said aloud: 'Do you know what I am going to do? I am going to save Paris and lose my popularity.' And he went. The election over, he left the Chamber, got into a cab with one of his friends, Comte d'Esgrigny, from whom I have these particulars, and after a moment's silence remarked: 'My dear fellow, the end has come. In another month, I'll only be fit to fling to the dogs.' In the course of his existence he has been justly compared to very great men indeed, but on that day he deserved to have his name associated with the name that remains purest in history, that of Washington.

His forebodings proved true; in a few days, influence, prestige, everything vanished, leaving in their stead, pain, disappointment, and bitterness. The troublous days of June found him, as always, ready to

confront the danger, but they struck him a mortal blow. He had foreseen them in despair, and expressed his anguish in one of those sentences, both tragic and vulgar, which sprang rather than fell from his lips like a kind of explosion. 'We'll not get out of this, except by a tremendous sweep of the broom in the blood-stained streets.' All the subsequent events were equally bitter, and the presidential election of the 10th December (the election of Louis-Napoleon) filled his cup of patriotic grief to the brim. It was not the loss of power that broke his heart, but the knowledge that his work was being destroyed, the Republic overthrown, and liberty becoming a meaningless phrase, the sight of a nation enthusiastically prostrating herself before the name which had provoked his loudest curse. It seemed as if the sound of that name aroused the prophetic instinct once more, as if it enabled him to see the penalty we should have to pay one day for this fetichism, and like Brutus on the plains of Thessaly, he uttered the cry of despair: 'These people are unstable as sand. I ought to have had myself killed on the steps of Louis-Philippe's throne.'

And now I have come to those dark and last years which were to him but a protracted struggle against the servitude of debt, during which, it must be admitted, he often failed in dignity—from sheer pride. He was too apt to remember what France owed to him, and too apt to forget what he owed to himself.

I will not stop to discuss the subject, remembering as I do that delightful reply of Saint-Marc Girardin before whom some one charged Lamartine with improvidence and dissipation. 'There may be some truth in what you say, but I know many people who have put their names to as many bills and who have not put their names to 'Les Méditations.' '\* Besides, we ought not to forget that his trials became sanctified as it were by his unremitting labour, that the devotion shown under them invested them with a poesy of their own. Lamartine was no longer the Lamartine of old, the idea frequently eluded his grasp while the pen, like Walter Scott's, still laboured on, laboured on without ceasing, to pay what he owed. Heaven vouchsafed to him an admirable auxiliary in that labour; one instance will suffice to prove it.

Lamartine had taken up his quarters for the time being at Saint-Point. One evening one of his friends came to stay with him for a little while. 'Yours is indeed an opportune visit,' said the poet. 'I have just put the last touches to a long article on Béranger for the *Siècle*. Here are the proofs, read them, you will be delighted, it is a magnificent essay.' In due time the friend goes to his room and to bed, and begins reading the proofs. It had just struck midnight when there was a knock at his door. 'Who is it?'

\* In order to preserve as much as possible the epigrammatic turn of the remark, I have taken a liberty with the French text which runs, '*Mais je connais tant de gens qui en font autant et qui non pas fait "Les Méditations."*'—TR.

he asked. 'It is I,' replied a gentle voice, 'Mme. de Lamartine, I wish to speak to you.' 'I can't open, madame; I am in bed.' 'Never mind, the door is at the foot of your bed, just open it a little way and take this.' The friend does as he is told and takes a paper from the hand appearing in the aperture. Then he closes the door and reads: 'There is on page 13 a passage that worries me. I fear it will hurt M. de Lamartine with the readers of the *Siècle*. Could it not be modified in this way?' The modification was excellent. The friend had just finished copying it on the margin of the proof when there was a second knock. 'Is that you, madame?' he asks. 'Yes, open your door as you did before and take this second paper.' And again he reads. 'On page 32, there is another passage which,' etc., etc.

Is it not charming, this devotion, that purity of mind which for the moment forgets all conventionality; that purity which for the nonce dispenses with modesty, is it not touching indeed? For we should bear in mind that Mme. de Lamartine was not only one of the most saintlike of women, but a puritanical besides. And in saying this, I am putting it mildly, she was an Englishwoman who added British prudery in every form to French delicacy in every form; nevertheless, she bravely knocks at midnight at a young fellow's door, undeterred by his answer that he is in bed and quietly hands him through a 'door ajar' two little notes just as lovers do with their



correspondence. The end of the story is worthy of the beginning. Next morning at the breakfast table Mme. de Lamartine starts interrogating her accomplice by means of signals and looks, and he in his turn and by the same means conveys to her that the corrections have been made. 'Well, dear friend,' says Lamartine, 'have you read my "Béranger?"' 'Of course I have.' 'Magnificent, isn't it.' 'Magnificent is the word, still there are one or two passages. . . .' 'Don't ask me to make any changes; I'll not make any, the thing is perfect.' 'No doubt it is, still, if you will permit me to show you two slight modifications. . . .' Saying which, he hands the corrected proofs to Lamartine, who casts his eyes over them and exclaims: 'Excellent, very just indeed. You are perfectly right.' Then turning to his wife, he says: 'These things would never have struck you, my dear.' Mme. de Lamartine simply bent over her plate and smiled.

This admirable companion through good and evil days, had to leave the man in whom her life had been centred to battle with the world. Not quite alone, though, for she had the comfort in leaving him, to bequeath, as it were, a devotion equal to hers, a daughter's devotion, which tenderly watched over the last sad years, so full of anguish, of the poet, which vigilantly watches to-day over the poet's posthumous fame. The memory of Lamartine has its Antigone.

His obsequies were marked by a pathetic incident.



His remains were taken to Saint-Point, and left the rail at Mâcon. It was winter and snowing fast, as the hearse slowly wended its way through the small communes and boroughs scattered along the route. At the entrance to each village stood the priest waiting for the coffin to offer up a prayer. The bells of the different churches never ceased tolling, they answered one another, and announced to the more distant ones the approach of the funeral procession. At a short distance from Saint-Point an old peasant stood weeping on his doorstep. 'You' may well cry, my good man,' said Jules Sandeau, taking his hands in his own, 'you have sustained a great loss.' 'Indeed, monsieur, he was an honour to our commune,' was the answer. The old peasant spoke the truth, Lamartine was an honour to the commune as he was to the province, to the province as he was to France, to France as he was to Europe, as he was to humanity at large; he was an honour to manhood itself.

What I wish to study finally in Lamartine is *the man*, that is, one of the strangest and most original beings the world has produced. One's astonishment in him never ceased, everything in him was both in harmony and in contrast. The aristocratic beauty of the face and the splendid gait was marred by a carelessness of dress which became still more conspicuous by his princely air and inborn elegance. Eloquence of the most startling and striking kind, the eloquence of the tribune, full of sentences sharply outlined like

medals and powerful ideas translated into brilliant language, the whole emphasised by a glass full of wine he was for ever waving over the heads of the terrified shorthand reporters. A crushing burden of debt, the existence of which he could not have explained, for his wants were few, almost none ; he was as sober and frugal as an Arab. Not a single extravagant taste ; in the way of luxuries he only cared for horses. Not a single vice ; I am mistaken, he had one, at any rate, he boasted of one, but the reason why he broke himself of it is so strange that I give it here as the finishing touch to his portrait.

‘When I was young,’ he said, ‘I was a passionate gambler, but one night at Naples, I discovered an infallible means of breaking the bank. Of course from that moment, I could not go on playing, I was sure to win.’ I have got an idea that that kind of gambler is not often met with.

It has often been said that God had endowed him with almost every blessing, beauty, high-birth, courage, genius ; but something more rare than all those gifts had been vouchsafed to him, namely, the faculty to use them at will. They were ever ready to obey his call. No matter at what hour he was always ready to speak, write, or act. If a great danger came upon him in the middle of the night, when he was wrapped in sleep, no cry of surprise started from his lips, he displayed not a moment’s fear. His heroism was there as he arose, his courage awoke when he did.

It was the same with his poetical genius. His sister one day presented to him a young girl who wished for some lines from his pen for her album. Lamartine snatches up that pen and without a moment's reflection, without a second's hesitation, he writes as follows—

'Le livre de la vie est le livre suprême  
Qu'on ne peut ni fermer, ni rouvrir à son choix ;  
Le passage attachant ne s'y lit pas deux fois ;  
Mais le feuillet fatal se tourne de lui même ;  
On voudrait revenir à la page qu'on aime,  
Et la page où l'on meurt est déjà sous nos doigts.'

After which he hands the paper in a careless way to his sister, who almost stupified by the beauty of the lines and his evident indifference, exclaims : 'Forgive him, O Lord, for he knoweth not what he doeth.' His facility for writing verse was, in fact, such as to breed the thought that he was unconscious of what he was doing. Did he not one day say to a friend thoroughly engrossed in his work : 'What are you doing, sitting there with your head in both hands?' 'I am thinking,' was the answer. 'How strange,' remarked Lamartine ; 'I never think, my ideas think for me.' Truly, in the face of such a remark one is almost inclined to suspect that like Socrates, Lamartine had a familiar demon, living within, acting and speaking for him. In any case, one feels bound to admit that that demon was a beneficent genius, for he never inspired him with anything but pity and goodness. Kindness was the

distinctive trait of that admirable being, the supreme seal with which nature had marked him, the crown she had set upon all his other merits. There was a nameless grandeur about Lamartine's kindness, which grandeur, in fact, stamped everything he did. His sympathy not only included the whole of humanity, but every living thing created. Like those saints of the Middle-Ages, who, it was said, were bound by a mystical affinity to the dumb creatures and whom legend represents to us as surrounded by animals, accompanying their every step, while the birds flutter overhead, Lamartine seemed to keep up a mysterious connection with the lower creation. He has painted it in words and images more telling even than the lines of Virgil and Homer. So great was the sympathetic power of his voice, look and mien that he seemed able to command by some nameless magnetic attraction the crowd of animals living under his roof, to keep them around him, their eyes fixed on his. Those dogs, birds, horses were not so many objects of amusement to Lamartine as they are to people with nothing special to do. He looked upon them as comrades, nay, as he said himself, as brothers. He interrogated, answered them, for he seemed to understand them. There was a constant communication, nay, communion between that superior soul and those 'mere germs of souls.' I can see him as it were but yesterday lying on the couch and conversing on very serious subjects with two broken-haired

terriers squatted at his feet, while a small greyhound was perched on his head ; the latter pretty animal executing such sundry graceful evolutions now and then that I could not help expressing my admiration. 'Look at her,' said Lamartine, without turning round, 'she is listening, she knows we are talking of her, she is such a little coquette. . . .'

There are, however, numberless people whose exceeding great love for animals leaves them none to bestow upon men. Lamartine did not belong to these, his humanity even extended to human beings. His pity for, his generosity to, those who suffered was boundless and inexhaustible, and one day when one of his friends reproached him with some instance of extravagant charity, he replied, 'You'll not enter into the paradise of the good, you are *not too good*.' No one could have levelled that reproach at him ; I leave the reader to judge for himself.

A poor young poet, of the name of Armand Le-bailly, whom I knew, was slowly dying of consumption at the Saint-Louis hospital. I induced Lamartine to pay him a visit, feeling certain that his visit would do the dying man more good than the visits of half-a-hundred doctors. The moment we crossed the Sainte-Catherine ward, I caught sight of the poor young fellow at the far end of the room. He was sitting near the stove, his elbows on the table, and his hands clutching his head, the long hair on which almost hid his face. At the sound of our steps he



looks up with a wild terrified stare, but the moment he recognises my companion, stupefaction, joy, pride, sympathy, all struggle for the mastery in his features. Quivering like an aspen leaf, he rises, comes towards us and has barely the strength to bend reverently over the hand the great poet holds out to him and to touch it with his lips. Lamartine's conversation was simply a mixture of a father's kindness and a poet's goodness. He spoke to Lebailly of his verses, he even repeated some of them, no Sister of Charity could have been more admirable and considerate. In about a quarter-of-an-hour we got up and seeing that the patient wished to accompany him as far as the door, Lamartine said, 'Take my arm and don't mind leaning on it.' In that way we crossed that long room between the two rows of its inmates, some standing at the foot of their beds, others too weak to get off their chairs, others again raising themselves in their beds, but all taking off their caps as we passed. The name of the illustrious visitor had transpired, and had, as it were, thrown the whole of the hospital into a state of excitement. Lebailly's eyes flashed with pride as he looked to the right and left; they said as plainly as words: 'This is my friend, I take his arm.' The poor fellow laughed and wept at the same time; he had ceased to suffer for the time being. When we got back to his carriage, Lamartine said: 'This poor young fellow is no doubt very ill, but he

may linger for a long while, and it would be well for him to have some comforts. Add this to what you are going to give him.' Therewith he handed me a 500-franc note. The reader may imagine my surprise when, three days later, I learnt that proceedings had been taken against Lamartine for a debt of 4000 francs, which he was unable to pay. Face to face with a fellow creature's suffering he had forgotten what he owed. 'Sheer madness this,' wiseacres will exclaim. No doubt, it was sheer madness, but it is an instance of sheer madness that may safely be published, there is not much fear of contagion in that respect.

And if I made it a point to wind up this sketch with the account of that charitable impulse, it is because it appeals to me as the most distinctive trait, not only of Lamartine's works, but of his life : namely, as something superhuman, superior to commonsense itself. Commonsense is a most admirable quality in man ; commonsense prompts him to do very good things indeed, but it is not the motive power of great things. Commonsense makes neither heroes, saints, martyrs nor poets. Commonsense would no more have sufficed to compose the 'Manifesto to Europe,' or to get the upper hand of the rabble at the Hotel-de-Ville, than it would have sufficed to write 'Les Méditations.' And if Lamartine has been enabled to delight the world, nay, to subdue that world, if only for one short day, it is because

he has ever taken his standpoint on a more lofty level than that of the world ; because he has been a great poet, trying to put his precepts into practice. There is a talk of erecting a monument to him ; if so, let those responsible for the idea remember what the ancients did. They crowded their forums with altars dedicated to youth, beauty, and valour. Let them raise a column dedicated to poesy, and place atop of it the statue of Lamartine. That is his rightful place. Right at the summit, looking up at the heavens, and commanding the city of which he has been the glory and the salvation. Let it be a statue which, like the God of Day, shall uphold a golden lyre with both hands.\*

\* The projected monument took the shape of a niggardly bust, relegated to Passy, one of the suburbs of Paris.—TR.

## CHAPTER X

The Portrait-Gallery continued.—Béranger.—My first meeting with him. His position in the World of Letters.—His moral courage.—The Atheism of the XVIIIth century and ours.—Béranger's Religious Sentiments.—His admiration for the Literature of Greece.—His influence over Great Men.—Whence it sprang.—His Wit.—His love of poor people and of young people.—Three Letters.

### I

IT would be sheer ingratitude on my part not to devote some space to Béranger among the masters of literature of my younger days. Though we were never on very intimate terms, his influence over me was very real. Three letters of his placed at the end of this chapter will show him in one of his most characteristic and least known sides; namely, as a literary adviser.

It was in the salon of M. de Jouy that I met Béranger for the first time. His position in that gathering was a prominent one. His talent commanded admiration; his independent judgment, consideration, and his satirical tendency, fear. He boldly satirised the famous petition addressed to Charles X to debar the Comédie-Française from playing the plays of

the romanticists, and this in the face of the signatures to that petition, for there was not a single one wanting, not even that of his host. He had the courage to take up the cudgels for Victor Hugo in that gathering, to place the 'Iphigenia' of Euripides above that of Racine, he even dared to speak of God. In those days a goodly number of classicists were frankly atheistic. Let me explain. I do not mean the kind of dogmatic, democratic, pedantic atheism from which has sprung that intolerance of incredulity which would gladly condemn to the stake those who attend mass, just as in olden times they burned those who did not go to mass, not the atheism that drew from the brooding, savage Mallefille the 'Don't talk to me of God, it is the despot of Heaven.' No, the atheism of the liberals of the Restoration savoured of the light bantering tone of that of the eighteenth century; it was witty, good-natured, laughter-loving. I remember Lemer cier replying to someone who spoke to him about the soul. 'Yes, I know, the soul that leaves the body when we die. You remind me of children who when they see a watch drop on the floor and find out that it has stopped, exclaim in a contrite voice: "Oh, the little thing is dead."' Well, it was amidst that sceptical society, at one of M. de Jouy's Thursday dinners that Béranger, pressed to sing a new song, boldly intoned 'Le Dieu des Bonnes Gens.' At the sound of that first line—

'Il est un Dieu, devant lui je m'incline;'



there was a general shock, almost like that at Mme. d'Epinaÿ's on the occasion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's rising amidst the very impious sallies of Diderot and Holbach and saying, 'Well, I, gentlemen, I believe in God.' Béranger's attempt in this instance was prompted by a dual motive. He wished, first of all, to affirm his religious sentiments which were much more intense than people generally imagine. Béranger was not only a believer, but a Christian at heart, if not by faith. His favourite book was the Gospel. He often referred to the 'Sermon on the Mount' as a masterpiece of grandiose eloquence and it will surprise many to hear what he said to me one day, towards the end of his life: '*It often seems to me that the first I'll meet on my arrival in the other world will be Christ.*'

His second aim was altogether literary. I am unable to say whether, as some of his friends maintained, Béranger knew Latin, or whether, as he himself maintained, he did not know it. One thing, however, is certain, he was by no means enthusiastic about the literature of the Latins. His admiration was entirely reserved for Greek poetry. 'Your Romans compared to the Athenians are only so many barbarians,' he often said, and added: 'Athens is the genuine land of art.' In his 'Voyage Imaginaire,' there is an admirable picture of his love for Greece.

'En vain faut-il qu'on me traduise Homère,  
Oui, je fus Grec; Pythagore a raison.

Sous Périclès, j'eus Athènes pour mère ;  
 Je visitai Socrate en prison !  
 De Phidias j'encensai les merveilles,  
 De l'Illissus j'ai vu les bords fleurir,  
 J'ai sur l'Hymète éveillé les abeilles  
 C'est là, c'est là, que je voudrais mourir . . . .'

Fed, as it were, upon Homer, Euripides, Sophocles, nay Plato, he conceived the plan after his first success, to raise the level of the song, to enlarge its scope. He considered the title of 'successor to Désaugiers' a mild kind of glory ; he aspired to something better than to make Venus rhyme to Bacchus. He wished to move his hearers, to make them think, to put grand poetry into small couplets and introduce into the burden of his songs not only politics, but lofty questions of philosophy and ethics. 'Le Dieu des bonnes gens' was his first attempt in that direction and as he often told me afterwards, he quaked more or less when submitting his work to that distinguished and scoffing gathering. The success was simply immense. He had been clever enough to mingle with that confession of faith so many beautiful lines, so much patriotism, so much grandeur of imagery and now and then so much wit that they condoned the belief for the sake of the talent. His third strophe aroused the enthusiasm of everyone.

'Un conquérant, dans sa fortune altière,  
 Se fit un jeu des sceptres et des lois !  
 Et de ses pas on peut voir la poussière  
 Empreinte encor sur le bandeau des rois !'

There and then the song writer was voted not only

a great poet, but a great lyric poet. His preponderance in the literary world was singularly increased by this.

It is difficult to get a correct idea nowadays of the part played by Béranger at that period. He was virtually the counsellor of the men of his time and no one wielded a greater influence over his contemporaries. And yet, he by no means affected to possess such influence, nay, more, he in no way courted it. Very sober in speech, more sober in gestures, he waited until people came to him, but while waiting, he attracted. The most prominent men of that time, Manuel, Benjamin Constant, Laffitte, Thiers, consulted Béranger in everything they did. At the revolution of July (1830) Talleyrand expressed the desire to meet Béranger. But their relation to one another was that of two great powers; they were like two sovereigns whose dignity prevents them from making the first call. Béranger would not go to the mansion in the Rue St Florentin where the Restoration had been hatched; M. de Talleyrand could not very well mount the five flights of stairs leading to Béranger's domicile. They confined themselves to talking to one another through intermediaries, there was, in fact, an interchange of diplomatic notes.

Later on, Béranger commanded the friendship of three of the greatest intellects of the nineteenth century, Chateaubriand, Lamartine and Lamennais. He knew and recognised that their genius was

superior to his own, and yet all three submitted, as it were to his dominion, all three made him their confidant, their counsellor, their arbiter, their intermediary in the most critical circumstances of their lives. It was to him that Lamartine imparted his dreams of financial speculation, Chateaubriand his never-ending complaints of money worries, Lamennais the misgivings of his conscience. Heaven alone knows how many days he spent in letting in some light upon the darkness of Lamartine's affairs. As for Chateaubriand's, Béranger used to sum up the situation in his jocular way: 'What's the good of talking? It isn't the poor fellow's fault; he has never been able to do without a servant to help him to put on his breeches.' With regard to Lamennais, Béranger did all he could to prevent him from flinging away his priestly gown. 'Remain a priest,' he kept on saying: 'remain a priest, you haven't the right to cease being a priest. Part of your honour is at stake. In your case, leaving the Church does not mean abdication, it means desertion.' Lamennais refused to be guided by him on that point, but like Béranger's other two friends, continued to recognise the value of and to accept his advice in everything else.

## II

Whence came this singular influence on the part of a mere writer of songs? It sprang from three things: first from his innate kindness. I never met with a kinder

creature. He was charity personified. He lavished his time, money, advice upon others, he was for ever careering hither and thither, for the benefit of others. This constant pre-occupation for others found vent one day in a delightful remark of his. 'I wonder,' I said, 'that it does not bore you to dine by yourself so often.' 'Faith,' was the answer, 'I have got a sovereign remedy against being bored. I never think about myself.' I could quote hundreds of instances of his generosity. A poor woman whom he esteemed and liked very much came to confide to him her distress and the impossibility of finding some one to lend her some money. 'How much do you want?' asked Béranger. 'Three hundred francs.' In those days three hundred francs was an important sum to Béranger. 'Here they are,' says Béranger, going to his writing desk. 'I'll return them to you in six months, Monsieur Béranger.' 'Take your own time.' At the end of six months, the woman, faithful to her promise, brings him the three hundred francs, which he puts back into the drawer whence he had taken them. After a twelvemonth she comes once more to ask him to help her. He goes to his writing desk, takes out the three hundred francs and says, 'I felt certain you would be obliged to ask for them again, and I put them there meanwhile. They were waiting for you.'

The second cause of Béranger's influence was his marvellous commonsense. The advice he gave you



was not only the best he could give but the best that could be given to you. No one had the gift to an equal degree of adapting the advice to the intelligence, character, position and resources of the recipient. Finally there was the third cause of his great influence. That sound sense always assumed a pungent form and often a deeply philosophical. It never ceased to be sound sense and there was always an intellectual flavour about it. His conversation was not only charming but fruitful in suggesting ideas. It was delightful to look back upon. Not once but a hundred times did I discover that this or that idea, simply enunciated by Béranger in the course of a conversation and the justice of which had struck me at the time, gradually got hold of my mind, developed and grew there, until it finally bore unexpected fruit. It was like a living germ deposited within my mind.

Béranger has been twitted sometimes with carefully preparing his epigrams, with polishing them beforehand and with repeating them after having used them once. Admitting the truth of this the harm would not be great, they were assuredly worth repeating. When Alfred de Musset sent him his first poems, he said: 'You have got magnificent horses in your stables, but you do not know how to drive them.' Then he added cheerfully: 'Never mind, you'll know one day; unfortunately, it frequently happens that by the time one does know, the horses are dead.' He

was equally plain spoken with Lamartine who never resented it. One day, while talking to him about 'Jocelyn' for which he had an intense admiration, he remarked. 'What a splendid poem, my dear friend, a poem full of genius of deep feeling and imagination. But why the deuce did you put those two or three hundred lines in which must have been written by your concierge?' Lamartine burst out laughing and replied as frankly : 'Because, my dear friend, I am suffering from the serious defect of not being able to correct.' Lamartine was right, one of the last editions of his contains *Variants* which are simply so many blots ; whenever Lamartine changes an indifferent line, he puts a worse in its stead.

Béranger was not equally successful in his part of poetical adviser to Victor Hugo. He intensely admired Hugo's lyrical poems, but was by no means enthusiastic about 'Le Roi s'Amuse.\*' He was afraid of Victor Hugo's genius mistaking its direction, and called his imagination to his aid in order to point this out. He conceived the idea of assuming the name of Triboulet himself. 'Pray, sire,' he wrote, 'do give your fool leave to tug at your cloak and to tell you in a whisper what people dare not say to you aloud.' And under that cover of the fool's cap and bauble, he sent the poet some very subtle, just and pointed, though withal measured criticisms. Victor Hugo read them, smiled and remarked in a satirical

\* The original of 'The Fool's Revenge' and 'Rigoletto.'—TR.

way. 'I see very well what Béranger is driving at with this letter. He certainly thought it very brilliant and does not wish it to be lost to posterity, so he said to himself: "At Victor Hugo's death, all his papers will be published and my letter amongst them." But I'll upset his plan and will burn the epistle.' To which Béranger replied jocularly: 'If ever I feel inclined to address something to posterity, I shall certainly not select Victor Hugo as the carrier.' Let me hasten to add that Béranger was as ready to hear the truth as to utter it. One of his friends somewhat impatient at hearing him adopt about himself an humble tone which was not absolutely free from affectation, objected to it. 'Look here, my dear Béranger, why not have done with all this modesty, which cannot be altogether sincere. After all, you know well enough that you are very talented.' For a moment Béranger sat surprised at this home thrust and remained silent, then answered: 'Well, yes; when I look around me, when I read what is being written nowadays, I come to the conclusion that I am not devoid of talent; but my dear friend, when I begin to think of Corneille, Molière, La Fontaine and other great men, a sincere and profound spirit of humility comes over me. Modesty, after all, is only the spirit of comparison.' This is but one of the sensible and judicious remarks that fell constantly from his lips. In defining modesty, he at the same time defined pride; for if modesty can only be

maintained by comparing one's self to others, pride can only effect an entrance when we neglect to compare ourselves.\*

## III

Throughout his life Béranger has had two great objects of predilection, poor folk and young folk ; one of the lines of his song on Manuel runs :—

‘Cœur, tête et bras, tout était peuple en lui.’

This line is virtually his own portrait ; he was of the people, he understood and loved the people, he preferred their company to any other. The blouse and the linen jacket pleased him a great deal better than the broadcloth coat. If a working-man happened to call upon him in the morning, he made him sit down to breakfast by his side. His great admiration for Saint Paul sprang from the fact that Saint Paul while becoming an apostle, had remained a weaver.

As for the interest he took in young people, I need only consult my own recollections and proceed to quote from them. Béranger's liking for any and everyone who gave the faintest hope or showed the slightest promise of talent was such as to prompt him frequently to go to beginners without waiting for

\* I am afraid, M. Legouvé overrates Béranger's originality in this instance. The very man whom M. Legouvé mentions in the first chapter of his ‘Recollections,’ namely, M. Regnault de Saint-Jean d'Angély had provoked a similar reply from the Abbé (afterwards Cardinal) Maury. The former was nettled at the latter's ‘pride of intellect’ and asked him one day what he really thought he was worth intellectually. ‘Very little, when I take my estimate apart from my surroundings,’ was the answer ; ‘a good deal when I compare myself to them.’ Béranger simply modified the proposition. —TR.

them to call upon him. The prize awarded to me by the Académie-Française for my poem brought me a letter from his pen. He wrote to me from 'La Force,' where he was undergoing a month's imprisonment, and after having conveyed his congratulations in the most flattering and sympathetic terms, he invited me to go and see him. It is scarcely credible but I neither went to see him nor replied to his letter. Why, oh, why? Because I was too timid, because I felt a kind of false shame. Young people often suffer from those unaccountable scruples. In those days my admiration for great men was so intense that more than once I went as far as their door without having the courage to ring the bell. I remember that every now and then while talking to M. Lemer cier, I suddenly stopped in the middle of a sentence, saying to myself: 'What's the use of telling him. He knows every word of what I am going to say to him.' It was absurd, but at that time I was ignorant of the fact that youth in itself possesses such a charm as to convert its awkwardness into gracefulness and that people take an affectionate delight in watching young people's confusion.

As soon as Béranger came out of prison, I wrote him a letter, expressing my regret and apologising for my neglect which brought me the following reply. I transcribe it *in extenso* and without expunging the flattering remarks, because they testify to his loving sympathy with young beginners.



‘MONSIEUR,—M. de Jouy had indeed apprised me of your intending visit to La Force, and I felt proud to think that a brow with the laurels fresh upon it would stoop beneath the prison gates in order to come and see me. I am glad that our friend told you of my disappointment, seeing that to-day I am indebted to it for a proof of your appreciation, which, believe me, affects me very much. I read the verses to which you owe your public success, long ago, and the poem contains something even more precious than beautiful verses ; the feelings which pervade the whole attest a lofty soul, and I cannot but rejoice, monsieur, to find that everything in you foreshadows the worthy bearer of an already illustrious name. It only makes me more anxious to become acquainted with you. If I knew the exact day you intended calling, I would make it a point of remaining at home to welcome you, for except on *Thursdays* I am nearly always running about on business, which makes me afraid of missing your promised visit unless you would be good enough to appoint the day. But, after all, monsieur, I have one other resource left, namely, to call upon you, in order to express my sincere and cordial feelings, and the interest which I feel towards you.

‘Your very humble servant,

‘BERANGER.’

*October 30, 1829.*

VOL. II.

X

Here is his second letter. I had published a volume of poems under the title of 'Les Morts Bizarres' and sent him a copy, asking him at the same time for his advice. It was his answer to my request.

'MONSIEUR,—The most skilful way of getting praised by the majority of men, and above all, by those who are advanced in years, is to ask their advice. I am perfectly certain, though, that no such intention prompted your request for my advice. If I could harbour such an idea for a moment, the candour with which every one of your lines is stamped would be the most effectual appeal against such a suspicion; hence, monsieur, since you have appealed to my candour, my praise will be somewhat stinted.

'I like the elegy to the memory of your father exceedingly; the sentiment by which it is inspired throughout makes it touching from the first line to the last. I should regret its greater perfection, because a more correct style and a more concise form would hamper the expressions of your heart and contrast painfully with them.

'But it seems to me that the subsequent pieces, with the exception, however, of the fragment on "Maria Lucrezia," which I except because it is full of feeling like the elegy, would have required more careful workmanship, a less "happy-go-lucky" phraseology, a greater firmness of versification and often a

more sparing use of detail. Nowadays, monsieur, finished versification has become compulsory. That finish is often carried to the verge of affectation and this may be the cause of your dislike to it. But you are too enlightened not to avail yourself of the good there may be in a thing.

‘By this time you are becoming aware of my freely using the permission you have granted me; I may, perhaps, be led to abuse it.

‘The title of your collection of poems, which implies a premeditated choice of subjects, was calculated to inspire me with a certain mistrust of the subject themselves. I am inclined to think that accident suggested two of the subjects to your mind; after that, you probably looked for the third and the next. Ought the real poet, and you are one, monsieur, to proceed in that way without being compelled? The poet’s idea should be like the female flower; it should await the fertilising dust the male flings into the air, and confides to the winds. A subject deliberately looked for will rarely command the inspiration its execution requires.

‘And here I must interrupt myself for a moment, for on looking over what I have written, I feel somewhat ashamed of the part you have assigned to me; not altogether, I fancy, in pure innocence of heart. For it is no doubt a very clever trick to make a somewhat superannuated song writer like myself enact the part of schoolmaster; and I cannot help

laughing at it myself, though it will not prevent me from treating the second heading of my sermon.

“*La Mort de Charles-Quint*,” monsieur, contains some very noble passages, and the drama seems to me as complete as the framework would allow. Nevertheless, I prefer to it “*Phalère*” which is founded upon a powerful and true idea, rendered very happily. As for “*Pompei*,” some passages struck me as very inferior, but others gave me the impression of unquestionable merit, such as for instance that of “*The Slave*” and that of “*The Last Love Couple*.” The latter have reconciled me to the unsatisfactory tone of the poem as a whole. If I am to sum up my impression, monsieur, I will frankly tell you that throughout the volume there is ample proof of real talent, of inspired talent, but which lacks a determined purpose. You appear, up till now, not to have asked yourself in what way to utilise the happy gifts accorded to you by nature, and pending the revelation in that respect by your own vocation, you are beguiling the time with preludes on a lyre, the whole resources of which you are already fully able to appreciate.

‘Yes, monsieur, I trust that, encouraged by the memory of a father so justly regretted, you may add to the glory of the reputation he has bequeathed to you. As far as I am able to judge, you have only to work and to persevere in order to accomplish this.

‘Pray excuse the length of this letter and my frankness which is perhaps somewhat too great. At the age of twenty I had the pleasure of coming in contact twice with the author of “*Le Mérite des Femmes*.” As a matter of course we talked about poetry ; he was kind enough to give me some sterling advice which I have not forgotten. My letter, I trust, will prove to you that I am not ungrateful. I only regret my inability to discharge my debt more worthily. But I cannot help repeating : what induced you to apply for literary advice to a song writer who does not even know Latin?

‘Pray, accept, monsieur, the assurance of my great esteem and my sincere devotion.

‘BERANGER.

‘*March 10, 1832.*’

This is a curious letter in more than one respect. To begin with, it shows the uncommon candour of Béranger, his great faculty of judgment and at the same time a peculiar trait of his character. Like most people fond of bantering others, he stood greatly in fear of being bantered ; like most clever people he stood greatly in fear of being selected as the victim of other people’s cleverness or even of exposing himself to the suspicion of being made such a victim. He is always on his guard against such a possibility. I have not hesitated for a moment to point out this weakness, seeing that it diminishes in no way his



innate sentiments of justice, goodness and moral force.

‘*Les Morts Bizarres*’ met with but a meagre success and I felt greatly discouraged. For a little while I made up my mind to abandon poetry and to go to the bar; for a little while only. Nevertheless, I felt in a state of painful uncertainty. I really did not know which road to choose. My prize poem had no doubt put my foot in the stirrup, but several roads were open to me and I did not know which to choose. I had reached that painful period when a young fellow is feeling in his way. I made up my mind to consult Béranger. Here is his reply—

‘Have you an idea, monsieur, of the awkward, nay, the fearful predicament you place me in by honouring me with your confidence? Are you aware that you are virtually asking me to preside at your literary existence? No doubt, this is a great proof of your esteem, and I cannot but feel greatly impressed by it, but unfortunately this is not sufficient for me to accept a mentorship of that nature. In your letter you stand self-accused of not having been to see me sufficiently often; well, monsieur, this confession on your part explains my hesitation to reply to your letter, amiable as it is in that respect. How, in fact, can one lay down a rule of conduct for a man whom one has not had the opportunity and time to study. Your reply will be that I have read your different

essays. Is this sufficient, think you? A few works more or less able (for I am not so severe towards you as you are yourself) only afford the measure of a man's intellectual qualities. But how can I decide with regard to the character of the man. "What does that matter?" most of our young men would say. According to me, it matters much, especially in an epoch like ours when one should look for no support except from one's self. Without attempting a thorough appreciation of your character, I have got an idea that you possess dominant tastes which are bound to influence the tendency of your mind ; and unfortunately I am absolutely in the dark with regard to those tastes. You have the misfortune to be what people call a young fellow in happy circumstances. From the moment of your birth, fate has smiled upon you. You yourself admit that but for that craving for glory, nothing would be wanting to your happiness. Never mind, that happens to be your own particular fad, I would fain cure you of it ; but when fate gives us all we want, the chances are that she gives us one thing too many. Well, my dear lad, go on pursuing glory ; it is a mirage which comes to us from the middle of the wilderness, take care it does not drag you thither. There is only one way open to you to avoid such misfortune ; try to be useful. That is the law God imposes on every man, in literature that law becomes more stringent than ever. Do not imitate those who are content with art for art's sake,

try to find out whether there does not exist within yourself some creed of humanity or patriotism on which you may hang your efforts and your thoughts. You have a kind heart, a generous and liberal mind ; as yet, the world cannot have succeeded in spoiling them by its flatteries, it cannot have removed all feeling of sympathy for your fellow creatures. Well, that sentiment, if properly consulted, will prove a safer guide in your studies and your work than anything the most learned men can tell you ; such a sentiment has sufficed to make of me, weakling as I am, something ; something very fragile, no doubt, but after all, something.

‘ My language, monsieur, will no doubt surprise you, it is so utterly unlike anything you are in the habit of hearing in your own set, but believe me, I am only trying to explain the principles that have guided my conduct since I attained the age of discrimination ; that hour struck very early for me, for at fifteen I was obliged to assume the duties of a man and to look to my own education. To those who would oppose the example of a great poet to that of an humble songster and who would tell you that Byron had no faith, I would say that Byron, the representative of an aristocratic state of things, which is fast tumbling to pieces and disappearing, could only have had negative beliefs. But they were, after all, beliefs, and there can be no doubt that his were, in a certain sense, as strong as his genius was magnificent. Be-

lieving, as he must have done, that the aristocracy was the flower of humankind and seeing it blasted on all sides, he could not but curse and reach that state of misanthropy, furious and ironical in turns, which has been so idiotically aped in France. But what is misanthropy after all? Simply a disappointed ill-requited love passion.

‘At your age the love passion is attended by happier results; your heart is in the full flush of youth, let its concern be for others as well as for yourself; extend the scope of your investigations, and above all do not be misled by the fictitious surroundings amidst which happy circumstances have placed you. Your mind and heart will soon find food for your meditations, and one day when you least expect it their direction will be revealed to you. Nature has mapped out the use for every faculty she bestows, we have only to go on looking for it long enough. Learn, seeing that you are fit to learn; meditate, seeing that you can command leisure to meditate; but, above all, let your concern be more for others than for yourself.

‘I feel that all this “senile drivel,” will appear very vague, nay, ridiculous to you; pray do not mind telling me so; you asked me for advice, and I imparted my secret to you, it was the best way to show you that trust begets trust. I sincerely hope that you will look upon this letter as a proof of friendship and esteem. I wish you to believe in those my

feelings for you and to consider me at your disposal whenever you may want me. It will never be too often. With all my heart, yours,

‘BERANGER.’

I consider it wisest not to add anything to this letter. Its publication is prompted by a deep feeling of gratitude and by the hope that it may prove as useful as it has proved to me, for this letter has often stood me instead of counsellor.\*

\* Of all the portraits in this ‘Gallery’ there is not one so strikingly ‘like’ as that of Béranger. What is perhaps more curious still with regard to his literary influence is, that after many years it remains with the educated classes. It is no uncommon thing to hear people in the best society clamour for a song of Béranger. There never was a soirée at M. Thiers’ in which his friend, Mignet a great professor, did not get up and recite one.—TR.

THE END



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